

# ***THE TIME OF PERICULUM***

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the administrative staff, aides, counselors, professors, and teachers, of the American public education system. Through my entire educational experience, I was always challenged, or given the freedom, to be creative. It is my hope that this system continues to retain caring, competent, energetic, enthusiastic, and supportive personnel. Our future generation's education will depend on it.

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## CHAPTER ONE

I awoke June 16, 2052, as I did on any other day, at 0900. I did not have to report to work at the L. W. C. A. (Lunar Weather Controlling Administration), until two hours later. Getting the news tapes, I inserted the latest edition of them into my deskcom and proceeded to read them. I hadn't gotten far, when I recognized the face of my old friend, Lee Roalnvoo, on the second page. I zoomed in on the accompanying story and found, to my surprise, that he was to be tried for war crimes he committed during the war of '50. According to the article, a few insects and the old government of Mexico were bringing charges against him. The charges relate to his role at the N. S. A. (National Security Agency) acting as General Walthers, as opposed to his real identity or his other covers.

The trial was scheduled to begin today at 1600 in the Earth Jurisdiction Orbital Court (Ejoc). After reading the article, I leaned back in the chair and wondered why Lee had not told me of this. Maybe he just didn't want to get me involved. After all, I had done my share of misdoings during the war. Then a novel thought struck me. What if I went down to the Ejoc and gave him some moral support? I called my boss via the deskcom and told him I was not coming in today because I had a court appearance. He accepted my excuse, so I gathered my pocom (pocket computer) and called my TAV (Transatmospheric vehicle) to me. When I walked out the door, my speedster was already there, waiting for me. I climbed in, and harnessed myself securely.

After inserting the proper coordinates into the navcom, I rocketed from my lunar home, on my way to Earth orbit.

After a six hour flight, I arrived at the station and docked with one of the hanger modules. After egressing from my craft, I put on a pair of no-floaters, to keep me on the ground so to speak. Being somewhat lost, I walked to the nearest modem and plugged my pocom into it. After a few seconds, I accessed the trial location and had the display show me the best route.

Minutes later, I arrived in a room packed with reporters. It was obvious the trial was already in progress. I stood near the rear of the room and gave the place the "once over

In the other side of the room, a large black podium stood oppressively. It hid most of the man behind it effectively. The man had gray hair partly covered by a hat and parted over his left eye. His eyes were a pale blue, and he looked vaguely familiar. He was about two meters tall and appeared to be very muscular. He had a few hour's stubble on his prematurely wrinkled face. They say alcohol gives one that appearance after a while. The thought of a drunken judge presiding over my friend was a distressing one. I decided to listen to what the judge had to say.

The judge gave a brief description of the events that occurred during the war and then asked for his first witness. A spider named Merri scampered along a thin web from his place in the corner of the room to the stand. The arachnid reoriented itself to speak into a compulator. I listened with great interest, as I had never heard of the war from the insect's perspective.

"There had been many changes between the last two wars humans and us fought," it began.

“Eventually Herman died, and there was a great struggle amongst ourselves as we strived to proclaim a new imperial leader. After the fight, which lasted for two generations, Loak the

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Locust emerged victorious. He immediately began to consolidate his power. Unfortunately, Loak was 13 generations old, an unheard of age. His reign lasted only two seasons.”

“During the melee for the seat that followed, in a small territory near where humans once lived, a change which took six generations to be noticed occurred. At first, only newly hatched ants and other ground roving insects were affected. An extra eye here, missing antennae there, were the first indications that something was different in ‘Frisco. At first we thought the mutations were a result of just how bizarre humanity had gotten in ‘Frisco before the first war. We now know about the war humanity fought with itself in 2041, and how Insecthive bore the brunt of the human suns. Regardless of the cause, about one season before Loak was installed as leader, a strange mutation occurred. In one hatchery of the Green’s nest, a newly hatched wasp emerged from it’s egg so profoundly different that they knew it was destined to change how all insects would live ...for a thousand generations or more.~~

“The Greens named it Louthier. Louthier was a wasp and had streamlined wings and a heavily armored exoskeleton. Apart from the few physical differences, there were hidden changes that took three generations to manifest themselves. Louthier developed an uncanny ability to sway the populace to his side of an argument. By the time Louthier was nine generations old, Loak died, and another battle for the seat began. Louthier won, and he quickly formed a platform determined to continue the first war against you humans,” it explained.

“Why would Louthier want to continue a war against humanity when you finally received your own territory free of humans in 2041?” asked the judge.

“That is why he wanted to attack. Herman was out of touch with the whims of the populace. There was no sentiment equal to what Herman felt, at least as far as stopping the war was concerned. Most of the population was glad when Herman died, because he believed in only limited wars with limited goals. He was too much of an insectarian. Of course Herman and Loak were ineffectual because they did not want to violate the controls you humans placed on us which were unjust and stif..” he was cut off

“The controls that Merri is referring to,” interrupted Lee, “were negotiated between Herman and then President Ernst Gilbert, of the U.S.A. Both agreed to normalize relations and moved to work out their differences to ensure a lasting peace. One of the controls was that the insects were not allowed to form into large groups. Also, the U.S. was to be informed in advance of the time, place, and context of any assemblies. In exchange for adhering to these protocol, the insects were given Califington, the pieces blown off the continental U.S. by the Russians during the war of’41.”

"You forgot to mention one," corrected Merri. "You know, where the leader of Insecthive was not allowed to make any decisions concerning internal affairs without first consulting the President of the U. S. That was the most disliked of all the controls. When Herman and Loak were no longer in control of the imperial seat, Louther took over and brought the populace back to their feet with blood stirring speeches and the like. He put the word 'pride' back into the lexicon of Insecthive. He told us that we had been wronged by the treaty, and that we should continue the war against humanity. After all, we had just won a major victory -the proclamation of Insecthive as a Mammalian-free territory."

"That'll be all for now, Merri. You may go back to your web," spoke the judge.

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Merri crawled along the edge of the table, attached a piece of webbing, and sailed across the room, blown by convective currents.

"We will now call to the witness stand Glen Walthers, the accused. He was the former Ambassador from the United States to Insecthive. Swear him in bailiff," ordered the judge.

Lee approached the witness stand. He was an aging man, approximately 42 years old. His graying hair was parted to cover his baldness, to little effect. He looked clean shaven, and his skin was of a healthy color. On his 1.9 meter frame, he wore his military dress uniform proudly.

"Do you swear on Gytia to tell the truth, so help you cosmically?" asked the bailiff

"I do," was the reply.

"Mr. Walthers, please tell this court about your role as Ambassador, and explain why you failed to stop what eventually occurred."

"Well, it was a Tuesday or Thursday, of February 23, 2042, when I was approached by President Gilbert. He asked me if I would take the job of Ambassador from the U.S. to Insecthive. At the time, I was working for the National Security Agency as a prog. This tied in with what President Gilbert wanted me to do as Ambassador. He wanted someone with intelligence experience to spearhead a new campaign against Insecthive. I was to use a compulator in order to 'decode' and put into Amerish the transmissions communicated to the populace of Insecthive by first Loak, and later Louther. Once decoded, I was to send them to Washington, where they were processed and assessed. Once interpreted, I was then given orders as what to do."

"The first sign I had of anything going on was in 2047. On March 29th of that year, Louther made

a stirring speech inciting the population of Insecthive to take arms and move into the neutral and barren Nevadan Wasteland. By April 3, 2047, the land was proclaimed as a protectorate of Insecthive. Many insects moved into the newly acquired lebensraum. I was instructed by Washington to tell Louther that we were unhappy with this development, but as I'm sure Louther expected, the U. S. would do nothing. In actuality, the U. S. did react, with the initiation of project Annihilation against them. From September 2047 until June 2050, I headed the project."

"Project Annihilation was an N. S. A. sponsored anti-government project designed to overthrow and then extinguish Louther and his minions. We successfully recruited thousands of insects, mostly caterpillars. However, they were already under suspicion by Louther and the M. V. their 'police', and all 'cats' were deported. The refugees were set up in 'importation' camps in Arizona, until their 'rescue' by the advancing insects in mid 2050."

"With the disbandment of the M.V. and the installation of the hard-line M.M., Insecthive had become a military state by February 2050. Then, on June 17, 2050, I intercepted a communiqué from Louther to his military leaders. I relayed to Washington news of the impending attack and received a disturbing reply..."

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Lee was nervously smoking a cigar when his deskcom announced an incoming priority message for him.

"Hello," Lee said as he recognized my face on the screen.

"I've got some distressing news for you Walthers."

"Give it to me straight, General," he said tired.

"Well, you know those messages you sent me earlier today," I led.

"Yeah."

"Well, they have been considered, and we in Washington feel we 'officially' never saw them."

"What?!"

"Wait! We can't have another Zimbabwe fiasco like '34. We need another Pearl Harbor."

"You mean we have to wait until we're attacked?" he asked.

"Right. Ever since Zimbabwe, we don't feel we can attack first. We need another Pearl Harbor, or better yet a Miami. Is that understood?"

"Yes."

"Good. Let us know when it starts."

"Yes Sir."

"Joeles out."

"Walthers clear," Lee said as the screen went blank. He went to the kitchen and poured himself a drink. When will it start? he wondered. How many people will have to die for a ~just' cause? A few thousand like at Pearl Harbor? Or 15,000 like the Miami race riots? Now would be a good time to drink, he thought. In a while he would be so drunk that he will not remember this night. At least that is what he hoped.

Lee was awakened by the incessant calling of his deskcom. A priority one call from a field commander in Nevada was active. Lee answered the request sleepishly.

"Yeah, General Walthers. What?"

"This is Captain Alexander. What the hells going on?" he queried.

"Going on? What's going on Alexanders?"

"Its Alexander, and you know damn well what's going on. I've been sending you reports of insect movements along the border for days. I've just received word from my F.O. that they are advancing."

"I want to talk to him," commanded Lee.

"I'll see what I can do," Alexander said as he tried to patch a three way satellite call.

Now what, wondered Lee. Does he continue this charade, or does he put a stop to it now, before anything becomes of it. Everyone knew the government was in trouble. With the spacelings wanting independence, the economy in recession, and now the insects on the move, the government probably will be impeached. If the government found a cause to rally the public, it might survive until the elections. Could that be their reasoning behind allowing the insects to attack? Lee knew that if truly desired, they could eradicate all of the insects in days. But where would that leave the government which he is sworn to protect? He decided one last time to try to get a response, as he called me.

"It's 0230 in the bloody A.M.! What the hell?" I raged.

"It's begun," Lee said ignoring the formalities.

"Where?"

"Eastern Nevada."

"Good," was the only reply.

"What do I do?"

"Like I've said, nothing."

"Why?" he asked knowing he was overstepping his bounds.

"Because it is in the best interest of this government not to," I offered.

Lee's deskcom informed him that contact was established with the forward observer in Nevada. "General, I've been informed that I can now communicate directly with the F.O."

"O.K. Walthers, tell him to stay where he is and to report all that he can about the insects,

I ordered.

"Yes Sir." Lee made the connection with the forward observer. On the screen was displayed the corporal, who saluted Lee nervously.

"As you were," directed Lee.

The corporal immediately took up the position of parade rest. "Tell me what's going on son," ordered Lee.

"This place is crawling with bugs, Sir," came the scared reply.

"How many bugs have you observed?"



"There must be billions and billions of them, Sir."

Lee had visions of Carl Sagan saying those few words. He let out a laugh, which made his head hurt. "Seriously, how many are there?"

"More than I care to count, Sir."

"O.K., then can you tell me what kinds of 'bugs' there are?"

"All kinds-you name it, its here," came the reply.

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Suddenly, there was a buzzing that descended upon and over the corporal's voice. Lee could see the forward observer's mouth move, but he could not hear what he was saying. Lee instructed his deskcom to squelch out the noise and to do a contrast stretch of the audio frequencies in the hope that the forward observer's voice could be gleaned from behind the veil of incessant insect noise. The deskcom attempted to compensate, but even fully stretched, the computer could not locate the voice. Lee did not want to watch what he thought was about to occur, but he did anyway.

The scene on the screen suddenly showed a rapid downward motion. Lee could no longer see the corporal's face. He saw the ground rush at him, and after hearing a loud thud, saw the horizon and part of the corporal's body. Within seconds, arachnids were swarming all over the telecommunicator and carried it in an easterly direction. Lee continued to watch with mild fascination. Millions and millions of insects passed the T.C. at a high rate of speed. What an intelligence bonanza, he thought. In the distance, Lee could see a figure shaped vaguely like a man running meanderingly. A gigantic brown cloud of living activity surrounded the wildly waving figure. Slowly, the figure ran out of the view of the camera. After approximately one hour of watching the scene as the T.C. was carried east, Lee saw a figure of a man in the distance. As the distance to the body decreased, Lee could see, albeit somewhat dizzily, the figure with much greater detail. It was the corporal, and he was not in good shape. As the T.C. was carried past the body, Lee caught a fleeting glimpse of the body being slowly digested by maggots from within and other insects from without. Lee felt terribly sick. He ran to the bathroom, where he promptly threw up.

How terribly disgusting, he thought. He certainly did not want to remember seeing this. He instructed his deskcom to hold all future calls until further notice. Then he set about trying to forget about what he just saw. There are two ways of forgetting things one does not want to remember. One easy, and one hard. He took the easy way out, and asked his housebot to get him some tranatrophics. The robot complied, and Lee popped them in his mouth. He soon passed out.

## CHAPTER TWO

Lee awakened from his daze to find himself seated in a body chair and having a spotlight rudely trained upon him. He could vaguely spot figures in the darkness beyond. Then he realized he had been dreaming about the reply he received, and reality quickly set in.

"Mr. Walthers."

"Huh?"

"Will you please continue your testimony," ordered the Judge.

"Umm, where did I leave off?" asked Lee bewildered.

"You left off with the 'strange' reply you received from Washington."

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"Basically, all I remember is that I have a very disgusting feeling about the reply. I can't remember the exact details, but I do know I wasn't pleased with the reply at all, *so much so*," he continued, "that I immediately took some drugs to forget the course of events that night!"

"This court does not appreciate daydreaming during testimony, ***nor*** does it appreciate confessions' of illicit activities on your behalf while wearing the uniform of an ***officer*** of the Armed Forces!" scolded the Judge. "Now answer the bloody question!"

"Look!" slammed Lee's fist on the chair. "I told you all that I remember!"

"Then a lie detector test would benefit you, would it not?" the Judge turned the question around.

"And if I don't take it?"

"Then the jury will be instructed to treat your testimony as suspect, and your outcome will be adversely affected."

"Can you give me something for the pain?" asked Lee woefully aware of the seriousness of the predicament he is in.

"No, after all, pain is an integral part of the lie test."

"Then can I have an electrophysician stand by in case 'it' happens?"

"Yes. This court will take a five minute recess while preparations are made for the test."

The spotlights were turned off and the general lighting was turned on. I blinked my eyes several times before they adjusted themselves to the increase of light. Around me, members of the press were busily comparing notes and wagering bets on whether Lee will survive or not.

Two men and a woman wheeled a large machine into the room and positioned it next to Lee. The woman motioned for Lee to sit in the often deadly chair. After he did so, the woman gingerly connected various sensors over parts of Lee's body. Satisfied her job was complete, she left the room through a side doorway and set up some equipment inside an adjoining room. When she was ready, the general lights were turned off and the spotlight was once again trained on it's victim.

"All rise. This court is again in session. His honorable Judge Hopkins presiding," announced the bailiff

After we rose, we were told to be seated and we obediently obliged. I began to wonder about the name Hopkins-I had never heard of it before. I worried about what kind of judge this person was: was he a "hanging" judge, or a fair and truly honorable one. I listened with interest to the remainder of the trial.

"For the benefit of the defendant, I will explain the workings of the lie detector. The lie detector determines whether a person is truthful or not. By measuring the electromagnetic pattern given from one's brain, it is possible to construct visual and auditory representations of the person's thoughts. Whenever the computed algorithms do not match what the persons is telling us, a mild shock is introduced to the lying individual. Then the original question is asked again, giving the victim a chance to rectify their testimony. In the event of further attempts at cover-up,

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a stronger and stronger amperage is applied to the individual, until either the truth is obtained.., or the person expires," explained the judge passionately.

It was evident to me that the last part of the statement was added for psychological effect, and judging from Lee's cringing reaction, it was evident to him as well.

"My name is Susan Engleman. I will be administering this test. I am ready whenever you are Mr.

Walthers," announced and prodded a feminine voice over the public address system.

"Let's get this over with," he expelled.

"O.K., we'll start easy. Is your name Glen Walthers?"

"Yes, it is," came Lee's reply. At this point, apparently the court did not know Lee's true identity. He was taking a big gamble, hiding that fact so early in the game. There was a pause in the questioning, then Lee felt a mild tingling sensation throughout his body.

"Is your name Glen Penard Walthers," the question was asked in a more thorough manner.

Lee squirmed a little in his chair before answering. "Yes."

This time, the shock was much stronger than the first, and Lee's body jerked in the chair.

The question was asked again, with the Lee giving the same response. Again, his body was shocked by the increasing power surging through his body. Lee became hysterical and started

shouting obscenities at no one in particular. Susan came out of the room and applied a skin patch to his neck. Lee immediately calmed down, and his pupils dilated. He was sedated.

"Mr. Walthers, if that is your name, tell us your true identity, including name, rank, and security number," commanded Ms. Engleman.

A long time went by before Lee answered weakly. "Glen Penard Walthers; General-retired, 2-232-654-0202," he announced.

A loud sigh emanated from Susan, then about fifteen seconds later the spotlight dimmed and Lee's body convulsed violently. His body motionless, he appeared dead. The spotlight was turned off and the general lights turned on. The judge called for recess until tomorrow. The press left, and I walked over to where Lee was being helped onto an Amtrans by Susan.

As I approached the stand, Ms. Engleman turned and eyed me suspiciously.

"How's he going to be?" I asked.

"I've arranged for him to be taken to Elysium. There he'll be revived and his 'true identity' returned to him."

"What do you mean, his true identity will be returned?" I asked.

"When a person dies, their brain begins to decompose. The first things that go are the trivial memories, things like current events, favorite likes, dislikes, and any information which is inconsistent with what the deeper consciousness knows is not true. With revival, a form of amnesia is present for the first

couple of days immediately after rebirth. During this time, the brain networks are in a near virgin state, and anyone can obtain true data from an individual's

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thoughts. Within a few days, the networking becomes changed to the paths which the individual sees fit-including those that construct lies," she explained.

I found myself staring into her eyes, not really listening to what she was saying. She was quite ravishing in her red dress. She had brown-blond highlighted hair feathered back with a ribbon interwoven between the strands of hair. She had a sparkling diamond earring on her left ear, and judging from the size of it, it must have been made in orbit. On her eyelids she had applied blue mascara, which highlighted her crystal blue eyes and her deep blue eyelash liner. Her white skin was dosed with a touch of blush. She was very beautiful *and* she was not wearing a ring.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Huh?" I said reactingly as I came out of my self-induced daze.

"I asked whether something was wrong. I don't appreciate people starring at me," she said scoldingly.

"No, nothings wrong," I brushed off her offense. "When did you say Glen will be revived?"

"You mean you still think it's his name?" she was surprised at the admission of my beliefs.

"Yes, he's in a very complicated situation. I know because I served with him," I volunteered.

"You did? I'd like to hear more about him, if that's possible," she asked.

"Sure," I gleamed, then I caught myself and looked less happy. I didn't want to appear over anxious to be with Susan. "How about some coffee at say, Polly's Orbital Diner?" I invited.

"O.K., but I have to drop off Walthers or whoever he is first. See you at '8?" she offered.

"Sure," I agreed. "By the way, my name's Paul Jaffrin," I said as I extended my hand to shake.

I arrived home early, having the transport increase speed to keep up with traffic, which was going 400 km/hr. I told the transport to park itself as I rode the slidewalk to my doorstep, whereupon I inputted my personal identification code. The doorcom verified my code, and the door slid open. I told Pete, my housebot, to wake me at 1530, and I immediately fell asleep.

"Wake up.. .wake up.. .wake up you dumb ass... am I going to have to eject you out of bed?" asked the housebot.

"I'm awake, I'm awake!" I exclaimed as I reluctantly climbed out of bed. "Go get my dressy clothes, I have a date tonight."

Pete brought my clothes and I quickly dressed myself I called the diner and made reservations for two. After they were booked, I told Pete to get the laser disk marked Roalnvoo.09. Pete complied. I took the data disk and loaded the data from it into my pocom. < Then I woke up. On the next day of my summer vacation...> Then I called the transport to the front door.

After locking up and riding the slidewalk to the waiting trans, I harnessed myself and told the navcom to take me to Polly's Diner. I arrived later and looked around for Susan. She was no where to be found. Looking at my watch, I could see I was very early. I decided to call the Elysium and see whether Lee was revived. I was answered quickly by a man with a burly voice.

"Martin Oxford Elysium. Can I help you?"

"I hope so. Is there a Glen Penard Walthers there?"

"Well, sort of I think he took too long to get here, he's showing the classic symptoms of brain damage."

“Brain damage?” I repeated shocked. “What do you mean?”

“Mr. Walthers claims that he’s actually somebody else. We currently have him sedated and are awaiting transport to the FMI.”

The mention of the mental institute sent a shiver down my spine. “No, don’t do that!” I protested. “I’ll be there in ten minutes to straighten things out,” I said as I simultaneously instructed the navcom to “blast” on down to the Elysium.

Several minutes later, I arrived and jumped out of the transport and raced to the doorstep. I identified myself and was met at the door by a large orderly who escorted me to the front desk.

“What do you want with Roalnvoo-Walthers,” asked the attendant on duty.

“I’m here to sign for his release,” I stated as I thumbed through my wallet for my authorization.

“I need to see some identification,” he said.

I handed him my SDA/WSA (Solar Defense Agency, sector World Security Agency) IDcom.

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“O.K. Jaffrin. Sign here,” he said as he handed my IDcom back to me. I signed where specified, and was told where Lee was. I followed his directions and arrived at Lee’s room. I opened the door, and saw Lee lying on a bed sleeping nervously.

“Wake up soldier!” I yelled as was customary while using the cover of General Joeles.

Lee groggily came to. “Paul, is that you?” he asked unsure.

“Yes. Who else would be able to march in and see you?”

“Am I damn glad to see you!” He expelled. “They’re going to send me to Foreman’s. They don’t believe that Glen is just a cover, they think it’s the other way around,” he complained.

“Well, we’re leaving now. I got you out.”

“Thanks!” he yelled as he jumped out of bed.

“I’ve got reservations at Polly’s Diner with Ms. Engelman. She doesn’t understand why you failed the test, and we’re going to explain it to her,” I hoped.

"I'd like to see how you manage to pull that off"

"I'll be waiting in my trans for you when you're ready," I offered.

"You still have the Ganymede Speedster from the war?" asked Lee.

"You bet!" I gleamed with joy at the remembrance of the trans given to me as a reward from the President.

"O.K., I'll see you outside."

I closed the door and called my trans. When I exited the building, my vehicle was waiting for me. I climbed in and harnessed myself securely. A few minutes later, Lee walked out and looked for my trans. I called him on the comlink, and he ran over and climbed in the other seat. I looked at the chrono .it read 15:57:49. I was going to be late. I took manual control of the craft and ran it up past Mach 12.

"You'd better take it easy Paul, there's a 'bubble' on the scope ahead," warned Lee of an approaching speed enforcement transport.

My response was the rapid application of the fore thrusters. The decrease in speed was sudden, and we were thrown against our webbed harnesses. Fortunately, we weren't detected, or if we were detected, the bogie ignored us.

"Looks like we won't be too late now," I said hopeful.

"Yeah, maybe she'll be late too," offered Lee.

Susan let her trans approach and stop at the drop point. She exited the craft and instructed her vehicle to park itself Then she slid into the diner and asked the waitress (an actual live being, for a change) where her table was. She did not like the response.

"What do you mean he upped and left? Didn't he say whether he was coming back?" asked a perturbed Susan.

"I'm sorry miss, but he left without saying anything. We had to give the table away. I'm sorry," apologized the waitress politely.

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"Thanks for nothing," said Susan sarcastically as she stormed out of the diner and called her



trans. As she slid towards her waiting transport, my transport dropped Lee and me off

I saw her gliding the other way and I called out to her. "Susan!"

"Over here," she replied tersely.

"Sorry I'm late, but I had to pick up a friend," I apologized. "Oh, it's Mr. Walthers," she leered.

"Let's go inside. I'll explain everything there." "And where are we going to sit?" she pried. "Huh?" I asked confused.

"Where are we going to sit?" she repeated without offering any additional data.

"At our table, I should think," I said.

"They gave away the table when you left."

"What! Polly must not have let the waitress know. I'm sure something will work out," I hoped.

When we entered the diner, I walked straight to Polly's desk. She wasn't around, so I rang her bell. She came forth from behind, surprising us.

"Hi Paul. What's up?" she asked.

"I made reservations for 1600, arrived at 1540, then got called away. Now, upon my return, I find my table is gone," I bitched.

"O.K., wait a second, I'll see what I can do," she replied sincerely.

We waited for a few minutes before she returned with a devious grin on her face.

"O.K. Paul, I got your table back for you, but I think that Congresser is going to raise your taxes!"

"Hey, thanks Polly, I owe you one," I offered appreciation.

We took our seats at my usual table, and quickly dispensed with the necessary orderings. Then things quickly turned to the nitty-gritty.

"Now what were you going to tell me about Mr. Walthers," Susan asked me.

"Well, what I was saying was that at the time, Mr. Walthers, or Lee Roalnvoo as he is uncommonly called, was telling the truth about being who he was as far as his conscience knew. Subconsciously his body knew he was incorrect. Back in '38, Lee joined the N.S.A. of the U.S.A. As standard procedure, he was given a cover. This cover was of General Glen Penard Walthers. After living the life of Walthers for fourteen years under the control of the N.S.A., his mind let go Lee's reality and, dismissed the idea of there being an entity called Roalnvoo. In a way, he's lucky he 'died'. With his brain starved of oxygen, the information on Glen was considered secondary by his body and was dismissed. When Lee was revived, he forgot about being Walthers and he

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became his 'normal' self', I lied trying to cover up the fact that Lee had actually consciously lied to protect his former double-agent status.

Just then, Lee groaned and grabbed his head.

"Hey Lee, you O.K.?" I asked.

"I have one hell of a headache," he said.

"It's the after-effects of the death," explained Susan.

"Take some spifoim, you'll be O.K. after that."

Lee continued to have spasms, and the conversation quickly degenerated into small talk, and soon afterwards the meeting was terminated, with Lee taking a taxitrans, and Susan and I going to our respective homes.

## CHAPTER THREE

Later that night I was awakened by someone at my door. I checked the view, and it was an enforcement officer. Slowly and deliberately, I dressed myself and headed for the door

"Yeah," I asked of the officer.

"Are you a General Joeles, alias Paul Wendall Jaffrin?" he asked knowingly.

I was shocked. There were only a handful of people who knew of my cover during the war of '50. I wondered what the officer wanted with me. "Yes I am the later, but I don't recognize the former," I lied hoping to force his hand.

"Come on Jaffrin, don't make me magcuff you," she warned. "We know all about you and your acts during the war .your friend spilled his guts out at the Elysium," she explained.

"O.K., so what?"

"I have in my hands a summons for your appearance in tomorrow's court. You are being accused of causing the deaths of millions as a result of your direct actions during the war. Oh, and in case you're thinking of leaving .I'll be here waiting for you to take you to the court t.r.w.," she threatened.

I was shocked. For a few minutes, my mind raced through various escape scenarios. Then I silently closed the door, went to sleep, and awaited my fate.

"Wake up.. .wake up! Wake up you dumb ass! Am I going to have to eject you out of bed?" scorned the housebot. Realizing I was not responding, the housebot levitated and glided to my bed and ejected me out of it.

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"What the hell!" I exclaimed as I slowly sprung out of bed, heading for the floor. Lucky for me I was on the moon, I remarked upon my soft impact with the floor.

"Pete?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Remind me to reprogram your wake-up mode the next time you're up for maintenance," I ordered.

"Yes Sir," was it's reply.

Now that I was awake, I checked the view and found not surprisingly the enforcement officer

waiting for me outside. I ate my meal, savoring every morsel like it was my last. I did not know whether it would be or not. After eating, I dressed and let the officer take me to the Ejoc.

Upon my arrival, many reporters were milling about. I quickly side stepped them and made my way stealthily to the court room. The bailiff noticed my entrance and informed the Judge, who quickly ordered the court into session.

"We now call to the witness stand Paul Wendall Jaffrin, the accused," announced the bailiff

I made my way to the bailiff and awaited instruction.

"Do you pledge to state the truth and only the truth or face the 'machine'?" asked the bailiff

"I do," I answered stoically.

"You may be seated," commanded the Judge. "Mr. Jaffrin, you are being charged with the genocide of 1/2 a million people, as well as the destruction of billions of dollars worth of property. You will state, for the record, the events leading up to and including June 17, 2050, and explain, to the best of your knowledge, how you came to be involved in the war."

"It all started basically after the war with the insects in 2041. At the time, I worked with Nowca, the National Weather Controlling Agency. I oversaw the cleanup after the Russians attacked the United States of America. We did an awesome job of reducing the number of deaths due to our controlling where the fallout occurred. Of course, the Russians, not being so fortunate to have the technological capability, suffered massive losses. Shortly after the nuclear exchange, Loak the locust and then Louthier the mutated wasp gained control of the insect government. I was contacted by my superior, Linda Reynolds, whom told me to meet her at Polly's Diner on March 2, 2044..." I narrated.

...Paul," started Linda, "we at the organization are pleased with what's happening in the Califington Islands. As you may have already guessed, we're reactivating you and giving you orders to go back down to Earth and 'help' President Gilbert."

"Why? I don't want to go to Earth. I like it up here at Gemini. Isn't there anyone else you can send down there?" I asked of her.

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"I'm sorry Paul, but all of our active agents are tied up .you know that."

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"Yeah," I conceded. "But what about my job? My boss is becoming irate with all the work I've been missing in the name of national security."

"We'll take care of it, as we always have," she stated.

"Well, what will I be doing?"

"Your job will be to report to us what's going on. We need an agent inside the White House. Your brother . Mike . turned us down. He's a regular groundhog," commented Linda.

"And, he's very loyal to his government," I stated.

"Yes. It is unfortunate for him that he feels that way, but he'll soon learn to regret it. And Paul," she hesitated.

"Yeah?"

"You must stay well away from him. We consider him to be an extreme security risk. I know that will be tough, especially since you are to be initially assigned to the base at Zeros, Florida."

"Hmm. Then how am I to report to you, and what should my reports be about?"

"You'll report to us through normal channels. We in SFInFE (Spacelings For Independence From Earth) need info on the unity of the Earth and the U. S.'s internal affairs. We must know when the time to revolt is."

"When do I leave?" I asked enthusiastically.

.and that basically describes my meeting with Mrs. Reynolds," I narrated.

"What did you do when you arrived on Earth?" asked the Judge/Prosecutor/Jury.

"I arrived at Zeros at 0800, plus or minus, March 4, 2044..."

.so this was it, I thought. This was the infamous base that my older brother went to during the last war with the insects. From what he told me, I pictured the place much smaller, and certainly less populated by buildings. My underestimation of the extent of the city was probably because of my bias from being in space too long. I supposed if I lived in a city, this base would be small. I was impressed with the height of some of the old buildings, especially the N. D. F. (National Defense Force) buildings. There were a

variety of military planes, high performance fighters, TAVs, and fighter/shuttles lined up on runways or poised on launching pads. I hopped off the shuttle and landed with a slump, because I was unaccustomed to Earth's high gravity. A corporal came over to me and helped me up.

"Follow me, Sir," she motioned. I followed her across the runway to an earth covered building. We entered it and boarded a subway to the command center. About forty seconds later, the doors opened and the corporal led the way out. We traveled for quite some time through a

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seemingly endless maze of hallways. Finally, she stopped at a door marked "authorized personnel only". She instructed me this was the entrance to the general's room.

Then she turned and left, leaving me standing at the doorway dumbfounded. Gee, I thought, maybe I should buzz the general. Good answer, good answer, I thought to myself remembering some old game shows. I inserted my ID card and depressed the buzzer.

"I need to inspect all of your credentials," came forth a voice from the speaker.

I spent several minutes inserting various cards and having them scanned. Finally, the door opened, and a beautiful woman greeted me.

The thirty-one years old general was the youngest in history. Her auburn curly hair, brown sparkling eyes, and her beautiful cheeks seemed quite out of place being in a uniform. From what I remembered in my briefing with Linda, General Katlin Larson spent more time out of her uniform than in it. I quickly entertained the thought.

"Good morning General Larson," I said as I stiffly saluted her (in more ways than one).

She returned the salute and motioned for me to sit. I did as instructed and sat across from her. Her typical army quarters were given a feminine persona by her personal effects delicately placed around the room.

"Why don't we discuss why you're down here, Mr. Joeles," she said using my cover that Linda had given me. "I know that you are, in actuality, not a general as you claim to be. I know that you are down here to observe how we handle the insects and that you are to aid us in any way that you can," she noted.

"That's correct," I stated simply.

"How much military training have you had?" she asked.

"I served as a orbital pilot for some years with Space Command," I proudly proclaimed. "Well, at least you have flying skills," she commented as she gave me the "twice over "I'm only accustomed to flying in zero-G environs, not 1-G like here on Earth," I replied as I returned her glances.

"How long are you going to be down here?" she asked as she enticingly wetted her lips. "As *long* as it takes to get the job done?" I answered as I emphasized part of my sentence. "I'd like to see, Paul," she advanced.

I was shocked. She knew my real identity. My mind raced. How did she know? What do I say? I reeled away from her and took a defensive posture. "Paul?" I asked imitating confusion. "Who's that, your ex?" I avoided.

She drew closer and her hand grabbed my leg. "Paul," she continued. "How do you think I became the youngest general ever, and a woman one at that?" she asked as she gently caressed my leg.

I began to wonder. She was beautiful, and yes, I was excited. "Because you're good?" I asked as I reached out and began to gently stroke her inner thigh.

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"That's right, compliments of Linda," she smirked as she grabbed my soldier...

I quickly returned to a more professional manner, given that I was on trial and that my sexual activities were no one's business. A quick recess was ordered, and some of the reporters went out to get cold showers. When the trial resumed, I was instructed to continue my testimony, without the side excursions.

"For the next six months I was engaged in training and orienteering. Afterwards, I quickly assimilated into one of the highest positions that any two-stared general had ever held, with help from Katlin. Eventually, I was second only to the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JC S). I was engaged in military intelligence with the army for some five years, then I became involved with the N.S.A. I made frequent contacts with General Walthers, his predictions of what the insects were doing were quite exact. He let us know in advance that the insects were going to strike the Nevadan Wasteland

and told us almost exactly their strength when they invaded on June 15, 2050...”

.I was done with my steak after my brother Mike was. My position with the N.S.A. forced me to contact him often. I was slowly bringing him to realize that eventually the insects would attack. What I could not bring him to agree with, was my version of the SFInFE viewpoint about the world as seen from orbit.

“You’ve never seen Earth from up there Mike. You can’t see national boundaries at 900 miles above the ground,” I began a typical conversation.

“I know brother, but you have not convinced me how you plan to carry this off We have all of history behind us. Surely you jest when you say we can put all of the world’s differences behind us and develop a unified planet. I mean, there are distinct differences between our nine and a half billion members of the human race. There are different races, different sexes, different religious beliefs, languages, social attitudes, economies, and overpopulation is a problem, and just plain human nature, all of which I say means you can’t make this work,” he countered.

“However, you seem to have misconstrued what SFInFE is for. All we want to do is show that even though we have these differences, we must work them out because we cannot afford the consequences of letting individual differences between peoples and nations destroy our tenure in this great universe.

“I agree with you that something must be done, but why should SFInFE use such drastic measures?”

“I don’t consider a limited embargo on the U. S. drastic,” I countered.

“What then do you consider drastic?”

“A total embargo. Surely that shall get our point across concerning your problem.”

“You say ‘our’ problem. If it’s our problem, isn’t also yours?”

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“Yes. That’s why we’ve decided to take such action as we deem necessary to fulfill our goal of a unified Earth, putting all it’s past differences behind it, and ready to leap forward to the stars.”

“Well, I think you’re dreaming, but I would like to see that. But what are the costs?”



"Sure, the costs will be high. I defy you to identify anything enormously important to humanity that was achieved without great cost,"

"Hmm," he said as he was unable to think of an adequate rebuttal.

Just then my pocom informed me I had a priority flash from the J.C.S. "Looks like you're saved by the bell," I ridded him as I excused myself and accepted the call.

"General, there is a General Walthers here who needs to speak with you," explained the voice on the other end.

"O.K., put him on," I ordered.

"General?" asked Lee.

"Yes."

"Find a secure link and return my call immediately," he instructed and then terminated the link.

"Hey Mike," I yelled. "I've got to go. Looks like the bar is out for tonight," I remorsed.

"Fine, be that way. I'll just charge all of my drinks to your account," he retorted.

"Well, if you do, be sure to program your trans ahead of time not to give you manual on the way home," I warned as I waved good-bye and walked to my patiently waiting trans.

After harnessing myself, I instructed the navcom to take me home. Immediately my trans took off, headed for the main strip at Zeros. Once airborne, I instructed the comlink to get me in touch with General Walthers. My request was answered by a buzzing on the other end of the line.

The general was no longer at N.S.A. I terminated the link and went home. Once home, I awaited Lee's call, but eventually I succumbed to sleep. Before too long, however, I was rudely awakened by my housebot Pete.

Pete informed me I had a priority flash from Lee. I instructed Pete to put him on the screen, and the CV awoke with a flash of light and the aged face of Lee appeared on the screen.

"Hello," he said.

"Its 0230 in the bloody A.M. What the hell's the deal?" I yelled.

"Paul, it's begun," reported Lee.

"Where?"

"Subsector A-4 in Nevada," he replied.

"Good. Good, good, good. Things are in the bag now," I commented.

Just then Lee told me to hold for a few seconds whilst he took an incoming call. He disappeared for a few seconds and returned to tell me he was in contact with the Forward Observer (F.O.) in Subsector A-4. I thought to myself about the sacrifice that must be made for our cause. "O.K. Walthers, tell him to stay where he is (like a good dog) and to report all he can about the insects."

"Yes Sir," said Lee obediently.

I shut the CV off and starred into deep space, thinking of the F.O. in Nevada. I realized that to think of it in my present condition was absurd, so I went to sleep and dreamt about what the insects would do to his body. Most importantly was what the insects would do to his telecommunicator (TC). I did not want the "regular" government finding out about what I ordered Lee to do. I continued to dream about the F.O.'s body being digested slowly but surely. The whole process might take weeks of time to complete. I saw maggots eat him from within and the ants use many of his parts for food for their fungi that was being cultivated in great numbers. I dreamt of the coming end of the world as I had come to know it. I saw many people die almost two billion. I saw many of them eaten as the corporal was presently being consumed. The rest died horribly the result of Tosbow poisoning.

Tosbow was one of the cornerstones of the great SFInFE plan. Our agents in America developed the deadly toxin under the guise of a well tested and safe insecticide. Actually, Tosbow (or T.S.O.) was as deadly as the most toxic substance known to man, plutonium. Tosbow was developed under a secret "black" program as a

method of creating a new class of chemical warfare (C.W.) without violating “officially” the terms of the United Nations ban of C.W. weapons. What the army did not know was that their deadly creation was actually going to be publicized to the world after it’s deadly effects were revealed to all by it’s usage against unprotected civilians. When word is conveniently leaked to the world about their own government poisoning Americans, surely the government of the strongest nation on Earth shall collapse. When that happens, we’ll be able to conquer the stars or so I dreamt.

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“Wake up. I have been programmed to wake you at 0730.” The housebot heard nothing, so it pressed it’s case. “You must wake up. You programmed me to awaken you now.” There was still no sign of my awakening. “I warn you, I will eject you out of bed in T-15 seconds. Fourteen, thirteen three, two..”

“Stop!” I yelled after I achieved consciousness.

“Your order has been complied with,” verified the housebot.

“Pete?” I asked the housebot. “Do you know how incredibly boring your wake-up mode is?”

The robot hesitated for a few moments contemplating my last statement before giving it’s reply.

“I was unaware that my programming was boring. If my programming is boring, it must be the fault of the programmer. You are the programmer, therefore you must be at fault,” chided Pete.

“Then I must see to it that I reprogram you. Please remind me to reprogram you someday,” I ordered still not quite awake.

“Yes Sir,” replied the housebot as it initiated a random factor to determine when it would remind it’s master .July 9, 2051.

After climbing out of bed, I put on some clothes and ate breakfast. Then I showered and listened to the news tapes of the day. Remembering I was supposed to check in with Linda, I told Pete to get me in touch with her. Within minutes, I saw her face peering at me from beneath the covers of her bed.

“Punctual as usual Paul,” she said glancing at a clock that displayed 080005.

“Well, I do try to live up to my reputation,” I said as I watched a naked Linda leave her bed and get dressed.

“Have you ever been late?” she asked knowingly.

My first thought was to ask her if she was ever late; having her period I mean. I repressed the thought, and gave a noncommittal answer. “Why don’t you tell me?” I invited.

"Yes, you have. As a matter of fact, not only were you late, but you missed your confirmation entirely."

"It's a good thing too, or I would've been killed during the A-morale uprising of '38."

"Well, we always did admire your premonitions," she gloated.

"Speaking of premonitions," I quickly changed the subject, "I've received word that the insects have attacked in the Nevadan area. I'm going to release Tosbow soon, and with it's part in the scheme of things about to be played, I predict within two years our goal of a unified Earth shall be accomplished."

"This is good news. So you're about ready to order Tosbow?" she asked for confirmation. "Yes. I think within a few days I'll release authority down to the Corps level."

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"Looks like we've got a long two years then."

"Yes it does."

"Contact me again when the next phase of our plan goes into effect." "Yes."

"Good luck, and may the Earth survive long enough for us to accomplish our goals."

"Thanks," I said as I terminated the comlink. "Pete?"

"Yes Sir?" asked my house robot.

"Get me in touch with General Walthers right away." "Of course," said the golem as Lee's face appeared on the screen. "Hi Paul, I'm glad you called," he said.

"Yeah, what's up?" I asked knowingly.

"We are not alone as far as problems with the insects go. According to Washington, the insects have invaded southern Norte California, Oregon, and Washington."

"Sounds like trouble. What are we doing about it?"

"Everything we can. We've rushed in National Guard troops to the Washington Islands and we're sending Tosbow weapons to Mexico."

"Good. How's the battle for Nevada?"

"Not too good. They've outflanked us in every sector and are advancing towards Reno. According to Louther's latest communiqué, the insects just ahead of the front lines are joining ranks with Louther's forces."

"Have you verified this?" I sounded concerned.

"No, not yet. If it's true, we may have an epidemic on our hands."

"Hmm. O.K. Glen, this is what we do. First, I want you to evacuate an area thirty-seven kilos east of the entire front. Secondly, I want you to conduct Tosbow sprayings in this area. This will become a buffer zone between Louther's insects and any other insects behind the lines. This will prohibit his forces from gathering reinforcements. Deprived, his armies should falter."

"And what about Mexico?" asked Glen.

"Leave that to me."

"Yes Sir, thank you," he said as he broke connection and ordered his tasks to be completed.

"Pete," I called my housebot.

"Yes Sir?" it asked.

"Transfer all calls to my trans. I'm going on a business trip for a few days, so only priority one flash calls are what I am willing to answer."

"Yes Sir," was it's obedient reply.

“Good,” I said as I called my trans to my front door. I left Pete confirming my vacation with my boss. I climbed into my transport and punched the coordinates of my destination into the navcom. Knowing the area was off limits to me, it asked for the proper ID. I inputted the code Linda gave me, and the craft began its roll out maneuver. As my transport lifted off the ground, the navcom displayed the route to my destination .south central Tulary, Mexico.

## CHAPTER FOUR

I arrived over Tulary, south central Mexico at around 0920 local time. I asked for and received, landing clearance at the dusty field Pedro calls “the Table”. As I made my final approach, I was amazed at the similarity in the outlines of the 153 element periodic table and the landing site below. After I came to a stop, I had little Pete (my pocom) search for Pedro’s ‘27 Omega TAV (Transatmospheric vehicle). It was nowhere to be seen.

“What do you mean it isn’t here?” I asked by pocom. “When Pedro sez he’s gonna be someplace, he’s there.”

“Paul,” came the reply a few seconds later. “I have compared our position with the latest Gips (Global Imaging Positioning System) images of the area. They show a brown ‘27 Omega licensed to Pedro Sanguuez three meters directly in front of us. However, my sensors, and your senses, have failed to detect his Tav.”

“Thanks ‘Lii Pete,” I said as I cued the command to exit my craft. As soon as the metallic canopy no longer obstructed my “true” vision, Pedro’s TAV suddenly made its presence known as it seemingly materialized out of thin air. The Omega’s bubble canopy popped open and out stepped Pedro.

Pedro was wearing a real straw hat hiding his greasy unkempt hair. His unshaven face and his gilded glasses hid the many scars he received during an accident at the Houston fusion reactor in ‘14. He had on a black flight jacket with the Gemini Station logo embroidered on the breast pocket. His blue jeans were faded from months of exposure to the bright Mexican sunlight. An automatic weapon pointing towards the ground was slung over his left shoulder.

“Eh Pedro, como estas?”

“Buenos Paul. How’s it going?”

“Good. Hey, what’s the new toy you got for your Tav, and does it cook an omelet in the morning?”

"I'd rather not say out in the open, too many ears, if you know what I mean. If you'll hop in, I'll tell you in the wild black yonder," he invited.

"Decent," I said as I crawled in and took the other seat and harnessed myself securely.

"What about my trans?"

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"Already taken care of," he pointed to the canopy where my trans should have appeared. I did not see it.

"That's cosmic, how'd you do that?" I asked excited.

"Tachabana at Capricorn labs came up with the idea of using several corns in parallel to break the user codes of a unit's acorns, and then to infiltrate and control the surveillance subroutines of the victim's unit. Once we're in, we can feed the sensors a bullet that will seek and block any data we designate, in this case a trans, and have it not be reported on the output. Hence, when you look at the screen, the target we designate is not seen."

"Aside from the obvious military implications, how come when I looked out my canopy I did not see your Tav?" I asked.

"Remember, the only reason we 'see' out the metallic canopy is because of the fiber optic matrix surrounding the exterior of the canopy. The corn in your trans receives the faint signals from the fiber optics, computer enhances them, and re transmits them to the plasma screen covering the inside of the canopy. We stop the designated item when the signals are being corn enhanced. As we delete that item, the corn simply fills in the void with a pixel similar to it's surroundings."

"Sort of like retouching an old photograph," I offered.

"Yeah,~~ he smiled happy that I had caught on.

"Then why did the Tav show up when we keyed in the latest Gips photo," I countered.

"Because the photos are down linked directly to the view screen without going through the usual subroutines. The corn only controls access to the view screen, not what's directly on it."

"11mm. I suppose then the only way to rectify that would be to infiltrate the Gips directly and place the bullet at the source," I offered.

"True, but of course we can't do that. The feds would be on us in a matter of seconds, even if we

used a tight lasercorn.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

After a few seconds, Pedro started anew, “anyway, I hear you’ve got some news for me from the states.”

“Right. The wars proceeding faster than anticipated there. We’ve been forced to withdraw along the entire front forty kilometers east since 0800.”

“No kidding?”

His question was answered by an affirmative nod of my head.

“That’s not good for us,” he sighed.

“No it isn’t. Has the Mexican government started spraying Tosbow yet?”

“No, the generals seem to think it would be wise to hold it in reserve for when the insects go for the big game, you know, the generals’ homes, the large cities, the politicians and drug dealer’s fields,” he stated sarcastically.

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“Oh well, you’re going to have to retreat Pedro. The State Department thinks if you retreat, it will create a vacuum the insects will have to fill. To do this, they’ll have to withdraw forces from other areas, thereby reducing pressure on the U.S.”

“A brilliantly logical and perfectly plausible plan you have there, Paul. Did you dream that up or did Linda program you?”

“I’m surprised at you, Pedro. I thought you knew me better than that. Besides, even if Linda did program me, would I have remembered it to such detail?”

“That’s true. I doubt you could have. Anyway, you know if Mexico does this, it’ll hasten the war. The insects don’t need to withdraw any forces because of this. Hell, on the contrary, they’re sending troops home from the front early because of lack of any real resistance. We’re making it too easy on them, Paul. Next week you’re going to have to come up with a better plan.”

“You know, that bothers me. My odds of probability figuring isn’t working well with the insects. Every time I come up with new numbers that explain yesterday’s actions, the predictive model doesn’t



predict what they do today.”

“You’d better stop gambling while you’re ahead, otherwise you’re bound to make a major mistake.”

“Yeah, but I got a hunch that everything’ll work out fine. Besides, when have I ever been wrong about anything?”

“Two years ago; remember Dawn? Boy, when she heard about Kelly, she really blew up. And it happened just as Kelly walked in.”

“Yeah, I haven’t seen as good a girl fight since.”

We both laughed, and then flew on for about an hour before returning to “the Table”. I waved good-bye to Pedro as I climbed into the transport and inputted into the navcorn the coordinates of my new destination .Libra Station.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

Seventeen minutes later, I was on final approach to Libra station. Libra station was an

assortment of thirty nine different work modules clustered around eight central living modules. On each of the main X, Y, and Z axis was a docking module, and flanking the modules were three very large solar arrays. Libra was, of course, in a geosynchronous orbit at one of the natural resonance points in the Earth-Moon system.

I docked with module DM-3 and carried out post docking procedures normally. I entered the module and was greeted by a happy Linda Reynolds.

"Hi Paul, you ready for the big meeting this afternoon?"

"Yep, I sure am looking forward to meeting the 'Unifier'."

"All of us third through six class personnel are. Previously, only personnel with a rating of one or two could have an audience with him. He's taking a big risk, showing his face to so many people."

"I guess that means we're close to achieving our goal," I speculated.

"We shall see."

"That we shall," I said as I followed her lead through the various corridors.

After fifteen minutes of a rather ungainly performance on my part, we arrived at the central briefing room to find a dozen or so "underlings" mingling about. All of them were occupied, and we decided to mingle. Linda took my arm and led me to the nearest gathering. They were discussing economics when we arrived. The small group consisted of two rather tall men and a shortly woman. The tall black man looked vaguely familiar. Linda unhooked our arms, and outstretched hers to introduce us to the trio.

"Hi I'm Linda Reynolds. This is Paul Jaffrin," she said pointing towards me.

The tall black man vigorously shook both our hands and introduced himself and the rest of the group. "My name is Dexter Semptat. On my right is Andrei Lgolhov, and my left is Helen

Goring.

"I bet you three are economists," I guessed.

"We are," Helen answered, pointing to herself and Igolhov. "Dexter's a diplomat from central Africa. He's upset because he just found out about the embargo."

"Embargo? What embargo," asked Linda.

"You didn't hear? That's why 'the Unifier' called this meeting. By the way, what do you two do," asked Helen as she eyed us suspiciously.

"I'm with world outlook, section overview, subsection oversayer, third class," answered Linda proudly.

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"I'm with world outlook, section under controller, subsections of weather, diplomacy, military, quantum thinking, and special, fourth class," I also answered proudly.

"Quantum thinking, huh? You must be in someone's government," guessed Helen. "Which one?"

"The good old U. S. of A.," I answered.

"All green personnel report to the Common Room in seven minutes," interrupted a voice over the intercom system.

Linda and I left the trio and headed for the meeting. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by the customary security checks, and then we took our seats. A few minutes went by before any official type stuff happened. Then a man walked onto the platform before us and made an announcement.

"You have two minutes until the start of the Fourth World Congress. Anyone who arrives after three minutes from now will be denied entrance. Thank you." The man stepped off the platform and waited patiently in the corner. Then, after two minutes, he rose and made his way to the platform again. "This meeting is now in session," he proclaimed. "I have the great pleasure of introducing to you 'the Unifier!'" and with that, all eyes turned towards the opening curtain...

The door opened and out stepped a young man. He walked to the platform and stood at the podium. He had darkish brown hair parted on the right; a close cropped mustache, blue eyes; was of medium build, displaying Russian facial features, and big strong hands. He was wearing a disposable yellow shirt under a brown coat. He lay on the table a small briefcase and his acorn. He gave the room a steady, sweeping glance, and then began his prepared speech.

"Friends," he began. "I have called this meeting today because I feel we are on the verge of winning our cause. This morning, at 1245 SET, I received a message from President Burton of the United States of America. In this letter, the President proceeded to explain to me the simple facts of the world today as he saw them. After doing this he gave me a brief history of U. S. space exploration since the late 1950's. He tried to make me feel guilty, I guess, of turning our backs on the nation responsible for placing us in orbit. Then he continued to explain the great economic benefits derived from the trade between the Earth and space. He said he regrets having to take the actions he was now being forced to undertake, but pressure from the E. E. C. left him with no choice. Shortly thereafter, the E. E. C., acting in concert with the United States of America, enacted a total embargo upon us. Upon receiving confirmation that the Independent Russian States were about to do the same, we were forced to act. I, along with the members of the economic and military members of the cabinet, have decided to publicly announce a total embargo on Earth as a whole."

There were cries of disagreement everywhere. "What right do you have to declare a total embargo?" shouted a woman

"Yeah, who elected you dictator?" screamed another.

"The Unifier" calmed things down by raising his arms in the usual manner. "It is clear that some of you are unsatisfied with my decision." There was general agreement with that statement. "Then I suggest that we hold a caucus right now to elect a successor!" he gambled. The

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grumbling ceased. I and nearly everyone present was shocked. Was "the Unifier" actually contemplating resignation, or was it all just a tactical bluff?

"Perhaps if I explain our thinking on the subject, you will understand why I chose this course of action?" he queried. We all concurred.

"We've been throwing around the idea of a total embargo for the past eight weeks. Our original intent was to use it only when we were about to make our final break. The U. S., the European Economic Community, and the Independent Russian States had, or were about to, take our ace in the hole' from us. We could not let that happen. I immediately convened the economic and political cabinets, and thought of some ways of dealing with this action. One option was to do nothing. This was quickly rejected because of the inherent defeat we would face in world public opinion. Next, we looked at the other extreme. To secede from Earth and to declare war on it this soon seemed too risky, and that proposal was also tabled. Finally, the total embargo seemed to us to be the only choice we had. Now let me explain what the ultimate goal of our action is to be."

The man reached for a glass of water, sipped it slowly, and continued his prepared speech.

"As you know, SFInFE stands for the independence of spacelings from Earth. But what many of you may not be aware of is SFInFE's ultimate goal. That goal is far removed from the stated position of our charter, and yet I am confident that you whom I have chosen to represent us will be in total agreement with the council and I on this."

"But first, let me present some pertinent facts, as I see them. First, the world population is adding 500,000 more people than are dying each day. Secondly, our precious raw materials on Earth are becoming economically unrecoverable. Thirdly, the great economies of the world's nations are stagnate or on the decline. The world standard of living has overall not increased, rather it has decreased. And finally, the great bread baskets of the world are ravaged by desertification. The great experiment of the wealthy nations bringing the poor nations to a higher level has failed. In fact, the opposite has happened, and at a synergistic effect at that. All this aid that the big four economies gave to the third world was just

dust in the wind. It fostered an even larger population explosion, creating even greater demands on the economies, resources, and environments of the third world nations. At the same time, it dried up the surpluses of the big four nations (the United States of America, Japan, Russia, and Germany). Without the extra capital, those nations' standard of living has dropped dramatically. Education, wages, employment, and opportunity have dropped, while poverty, mortality rates, crime, birth rates and illegal immigration has risen. In America, the decaying, neglected, and overburdened cities are on the verge of forming separate city-states along ethnic lines. Indeed, the United States, once the preeminent world superpower, is but a shadow of it's former self now. All across the world, tensions are mounting as we near the middle of the twenty-first century. The core group and I have identified the single most pressing, literally and figuratively, problem facing humanity today and that is overpopulation."

Murmurs of agreement met his momentary silence.

Satisfied he had chosen well, he continued with his speech.

"Overpopulation: What does it mean? Too many people and not enough jobs. Those without jobs turn to crime, so it's obvious crime has gone up. Education has declined as the

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caring associated with having a respectable job has vanished for many, especially in the cities, and I am referring primarily to the U.S., it is, after all, where I was born. Since the turn of the century, humanity has lost several generations to hopelessness. And when people give up hope, they can become a dangerous lot. The south African uprising was brought about by the great disparity between the races. Of course, look what's happened to that nation since majority rule took hold."

"Some have suggested colonizing other planets as a way of reducing world population pressures. I do not see a future where even those nations with the means desire to see that goal achieved. So, what are we to do about this problem?"

This was the real reason for this meeting, I thought. The embargo must have just been a cover for whatever he's planning, I summarized.

"As you know, many of you have nicknamed me 'the Unifier'. I'm sure whoever thought of that name was referring to my ability to bring us spacelings together and that he had no idea of my ultimate goal that of unifying once and for all Earth!"

He caught everyone completely off guard. How could a few tens of thousands of people unite all of humanity's ten billion crowded people? I immediately envisioned a bunch of ants trying to round up a herd of elephants. All I could see was of a future

where a whole lot of ants were killed.

Louie LaSalle then articulated how we were to accomplish his lofty goal, within less than four years he hypothesized. The order was put to a vote, which of course was unanimous.

Afterwards, we melted away, to be briefed on our part in the coming “time of periculum”.

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

Later that evening, I was awakened by an important call.

“Paul,” said the voice on the other end, “we want you to go to Overlooker Station and take command of your former fighter squadron.”

I was shocked. Washington must have heard about the embargo, I thought to myself I wondered

whether I should do as instructed. The importance of the intelligence bonanza I was being handed struck me. Then I was struck by a sinister thought . acting as the commander, I could order these planes anywhere, and SFInFE could use some weapons now. My mind raced through various plans of attack on U.S. targets. But would the pilots obey, I worried.

“Sure, I’ll take it,” I said figuratively and literally.

“Good. Be there in twelve hours. We think SFInFE is planning something big, and we want you to have a reception party ready for them.”

“I’ll do my best, Sir,” I said, still with no idea who was actually issuing the instruction.

“You’ll do better than that. Chairman Severly out.”

Upon hearing the name of the SFInFE mole, I immediately knew that the fighter squadron was being prepared for our takeover. All I needed to do now was prepare a plan.

Five hours later, I made my way to the hanger module at Libra Station. On my way, I caught up to a woman I had “rendezvoused” with occasionally. She was wearing a vibrant navy blue sweater, sporting a white collared blouse underneath. She had gracefully tied a blue bow, which hung enticingly around her shapely breasts. Her tight white pinstriped navy blue slacks fit her curves quite well, and produced a pleasing effect. She wore her blonde and orange tinted hair “poofed” out and curled inwards at her shoulders. Her purple eye shadow highlighted her long blue tinted eyelashes surrounding her deep brown eyes. She was a great lay, and with brains too! Someday, I thought to myself I am going to make Cheryl my wife. But that was the future, I had the present to be concerned about.

“Hi Cheryl, what’re you doing up so early?” I asked.

“I couldn’t sleep. How about you?” she answered in a depressed tone of voice.

“I’m going to capture a fighter squadron,” I beamed with joy.

“Yeah, and I’m your wife,” she said sarcastically.

Her facetiousness sent a chill down my back. “You’d better be ready to pop out a couple of kids, then, because I truly am going to get us a fighter squadron,” I said seriously.

“You are serious,” she said as she studied the face she had come to know so well. “From where, how, when will you be,” all sorts of questions began spilling from her.

"You know I can't talk about matters of security," I brushed her off "But you can see me off, if you'd like," I offered.

We walked, arms around each other, to the hanger where we kissed good-bye.

I entered the airlock and waited for the pressure to equalize. The popping of my ears signified this had been accomplished. The pressure light turned green, and I entered the canopy of a TAV. I entered into the navcom the coordinates of my destination -Overlooker.

About a half hour later, I reached my former flying space. As I flew a reconn of the area, I noted the station hadn't changed much since I was stationed as a Star Pilot with Space Command. The outside was a little scarred from reacting with atomic oxygen from the atmosphere, but all in all, it survived the war of'41 intact.

I asked for and received docking clearance. I quickly landed as instructed, and hopped out of the TAV. A lowly major was there to greet me. He looked disgruntled and undisciplined. I awaited his salute that did not look forthcoming.

"Don't you know how to salute, Major," I barked.

"Yes Sir!" snapped the major to attention.

I returned his salute, grinning to myself "Where's General Mely?"

"Sir, he's sleeping in his cubit, Sir.~~

"So where are my quarters then," I asked obviously upset that I was not afforded proper respect by the general.

"Sir, if you will follow me, Sir," he motioned for me to follow.

I caught up to him and walked on his left, though proper etiquette dictated should have been on his right. I avoided hassling him any further, all of the while hoping the pilots were better disciplined than he. My plan depended on it.

After much walking, we arrived at my quarters.

"Here is your cubit, Sir," said the major dispassionately.

"Thank you Major, you are dismissed," I offered.

He saluted and walked away, cursing silently to himself about the old timer who just arrived.



I entered the room, and put my effects away. Checking my pocom, I noticed I had arrived an hour early. I had neglected to take into account the time zone difference between the two stations. I hoped the rest of my homework was more thorough than that. Just in case, I restudied the specifications of the newest fighters I would be commanding. Compared to the TAVs I flew whilst here, the new ones were hot. Their navigational/attack (navtak) systems were tied directly into the Gips, so they were inherently stealthy. No emissions of any kind were required to find their targets. Even their C3is were secure, as tight jam-proof lasers were utilized as a means of communication. But they were beatable, and they did have flaws. In fact, they have the same flaws that every fighter has had since their inception a century and a half ago . they have human pilots.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

In what used to be called San Pedro (since renamed Hornet's Nest), an unusual high level meeting was taking place. Louther had called together his highest ranking surviving officers for a strategy meeting. Robe represented the flying insects, Stiver was from intelligence, Gernessy represented the flightless armored insects, Merri represented the special forces, Pilnick represented the MM, Lutz represented the unarmored flightless insects, and Farlan, represented the chemical using insects, were all present before Louther for the first time since the struggle to liberate the world of humanity began.

Louther spoke first. "Robe. What can you tell me about this poisonous rain the human's call Tosbow?" he asked concerned.

Robe, a yellow jacket, flew next to Louther and addressed the group as a whole. "T.S.O. is an extremely toxic substance. I have heard reports that it's toxicity is greater than that of the fireballs over the fault nine generations ago.

"No way," interrupted Merri. "I was there. I know that nothing can compare to the great fireballs that seared everything in their path. And with the fireballs, there was no warning, just sudden heat and wind."

"True," concurred Robe. "However, you seem to forget the small radii of the fireballs and that only

twenty have been known to exist. T.S.O. has been spread along the entire six day long front. And it's effects are instantaneous. The fireballs killed few of us instantly. It's more sinister effects are not apparent until later.. .um, you know what I meant," he corrected himself by noting that were it not for the mutating effects of the fireballs, Louther (his commander) would not be here.

"What measures have you taken to defend yourselves?" asked Louther ignoring the insult.

"We send volunteers, usually wasps, to scout out the area. When they pick up on their senses the rock-leaves that drop the Tosbow, they're supposed to tell those on the ground to take cover. Unfortunately, according to the few who survive the assault, they don't receive the warning until long after the rock-leaves pass overhead and dispense their deadly load. This can mean only two thing- either the rock-leaves travel faster than sound, or the T.S.O. falls faster than sound. Either way, the humans seem to be violating a few basic natural laws, which no one can understand how. Regardless, we still send up volunteers, but it seems fruitless."

"Gernessy, do you have anything to add?" asked Louther. Robe scampered out of the way to allow Gernessy, an ant, to speak.

"Basically," began Gernessy, "it's like Robe said. By the time we sense the rock-leaves overhead, we have only one or two beats before the rain comes down. We don't even hear the machines until long after they've past, and then the sound is tremendous."

"What defenses are you employing against this?" asked Louther.

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"What defenses can stop Tosbow without digging in and ceasing our attack?" was his hopeless reply.

"Maybe Farlan has something to add about this," suggested Louther. Gernessy took that as a sign to let Farlan speak, so he crawled away and let Farlan fly adjacent to Louther.

"We have analyzed the effects of the toxin. It is much like what wasps use, except that it is about two hundred percent more effective at killing, and reacts in only 1/47th of a beat. A dose equivalent to what a wasp dispenses will kill about 100 insects within a few beats."

Louther was astonished. "What can we possibly do against that?"

"Not a damn thing," was Farlan's reply.

"How many have we lost?" asked Louther.

Everyone clicked off their horrific losses. The humans seemed to be waging a war of extermination against them. If things kept up as they are, they war would be lost.

"I would like to point out that most of those killed were from the 'States, since only that repressive nation is using T.S.O.," interrupted Lutz. "And there is some good news. The U. S. forces have retreated about 3.4 days travel time eastwards. They've sprayed Tosbow in the vacated area, but it will dissipate in a few days."

"Good. How's our reserves holding out? What's the latest enemy body count?" asked Louther hopeful for some good news.

"1 088 human bodies are now being used as fungi feeders and for food for our larvae. Besides, we are gaining ground in Canada and Mexico. We should have a field report from those fronts within the next 60 beat sun altitude gain," announced Lutz.

"Good. Stiver, what do you have to add," Louther turned to the intelligence head.

"We have received reports that the U.S. is having some internal problems. It appears one of their younger hive wants to hatch too soon and gain independence early. The U. S. does not want this to happen, but if it does, it could be a political as well as a military bonus for us."

"How?" asked Louther.

"If this hive of larvae hatches early, it will cause a power struggle. Naturally, the U.S. will have to withdraw some forces from the front to fight this internal struggle. Also, because it is internal, the general focus will be on it, rather than on us. We shall therefore be able to mount a struggle from within against them. I have already ordered several thousand agents behind enemy lines to begin revolting. They are ready upon your order," announced Stiver.

"Consider it so," agreed Louther. Sensing a change in the mood of the cabinet around him, Louther delved deep within himself to find something stirring to say. "Harsects, let us continue the battle, for we are at a turning point in the history of Insectdom, and of this great land we inhabit," he preached.

"So be it!" came the unanimous reply.

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The other insects left, leaving only Louther and Gernessy together contemplating things. After a few moments to collect his thoughts, it was Gernessy who spoke first. "Louther, I have a major complaint,"

he began.

"What is it?" asked Louther with genuine concern. Gernessy had been with him from the beginning, and he felt a special affection towards the little ant, unthinkable a few generations ago.

"My command has taken the brunt of the Tosbow attacks. Our combat strength is down nearly eighteen percent. We've had to send many of the troops to the rear because panic is breaking out amongst some of the front line troops. Most of the draftees have seen a few survivors, and they are frightened by what the future might hold for them. Isn't there something you can do to relieve the pressure on my forces?" he asked with the concern a general has for his forces.

"You heard Farlan's report. I think the only thing we can do is to outflank the U.S. and concentrate on Canada and Mexico. If we can get to Alaska, I know some leaders in Asia whom will follow our lead . but only if we are successful. Who knows, if our troops survive long enough, maybe the whole world will be engulfed in a struggle with this new larvae of the humans. We ruled the world once you know, before the terrible lizards, and by Sol we'll rule again!" As Louther said this, his eyes lit up and Gernessy could feel the power emanate from him.

"I am so glad we have a leader like you to carry out our destiny, not like Herman or Loak," professed Gernessy.

"Herman could have fulfilled destiny as easily as I am doing now, only the time was not right when he led us then. I sometimes wonder if I could have accomplished what he did during those hard times so long ago..." and with that Louther went into one of his often had dream like states.

Gernessy, satisfied nothing more would come of the meeting, crawled to his command hive, wondering along the way whether Louther was worthy of the insect's complete trust in him. Just as he arrived at his entrance, Merri met him.

"I waited for you to be alone," said Merri.

"Why?" asked Gernessy, startled.

"You were at the meeting today. What do you think about the T.S.O. sprayings? I think it's asinine to continue fighting when the humans can annihilate us whenever they really wanted to."

"You shouldn't say things like that Merri. Pilnick's agents are everywhere. Besides, you've only lost 300,000. Compared to what I've lost, you have no right to bitch."

"Sure you've lost more number than I, but I've lost a greater percentage of my total force package than you .at last count 45 percent. That's what's so damn insane!"

“So what am I supposed to do? Go back in time and change the results of battle? If I could do that, we’d have won in ‘21 when our struggle began.”

“Now look whose talking,” noticed Merri.

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“Yeah, I guess I am two headed, huh? Why don’t we go somewhere more secure and talk,” put forth Gernessy.

“How about hill 403?” asked Merri.

“Sounds fine to me.”

They left together for the long trek to hill 403. After the first one beat sun altitude gain, they split up and agreed to meet after the sun reached the 130 beat altitude. After half a solar transit, they arrived within a few beats of each other. Merri began to construct an intricate web for himself, while Gernessy dug a little hole for himself. When finished, Gernessy initiated the conversation.

“One thing I can’t get used to are those wasps. We ants and those wasps have been warring for over 70 million generations. It’s only been in the last nine that we’ve cooperated. Good thing there’s a war on, or we’d probably still be at each other’s thoraxes.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” agreed Merri. “It’s been real hard on us arachnids. The first two generations after we were united with all you other insects most of us died because we weren’t allowed to eat flies anymore. So we turned to other kinds of food, like dead insects and each other. Now that there’s a war on, we can at least suck the juices out of the dead humans.”

“At least the war has done us some good,” conceded Gernessy.

“I agree. It’s good to war, but you can’t war when one side isn’t playing by the rules.”

“It’s that damn Tosbow. You’re in special forces Merri. Can’t you do something about it?”

"We tried," said Merri mournfully as he settled into his now completed web. "You heard my losses. Seventy-five percent of those were from a mission Farlan sent me on to capture some T.S.O. for analysis."

"What good would bringing Tosbow here do anyway. From what Farlan says, only time will keep us from being eradicated, and it appears that time is not on our side."

"Ah, but yes it is. There was a valid reason for getting the vials, one other than what I told you. Pilnick has come up with an effective plan dealing with Tosbow," announced Merri.

"Well, what is this great plan of Pilnick's," asked Gernessy sarcastically.

"Pilnick has established a vast larvae colony out in the mutant zone where the fireballs were born nine generations ago. He placed it there so the maximum mutation rate will occur, hopefully leading to a better insect, a sort of Supersect, of sorts. Already he has developed several different species resistant to the effects of other forms of chemical warfare adopted by Mexico and Canada."

"How does the T.S.O. fit into all of this?"

"Aside from analyzing it, Pilnick plans to feed these new Supersects extremely limited amounts of Tosbow over a period of several generations. He hopes in time the Supersects will become resistant to its effects, thereby allowing us to continue the war."

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"Can't you see what he's doing?" asked Gernessy alarmed.

"No."

"He's using you to create a master race of insects, over which he'll rule as supreme leader," proposed Gernessy.

"I think you're exaggerating things, Gernessy."

"No, I'm not. Haven't you seen the way he's playing up to Louther? And have you listened to his broadcasts lately? Or even talked to Pilnick one on one?"

"Well, I have, and I tell you he's out to become dictator. And if what you say is true, he and his private little army of Supersects are more dangerous than we anticipated?"

"We?" asked a confused Merri. From behind the grasses came forth Lutz, Robe, and fourteen others he had never seen before.

"Welcome to the rebellion," extended Gernessy.

Merri looked across at the emergent Robe. "Why are you mixed up in this Robe?" he asked.

"The same as all of us .t o stop this war before it's too late," answered Robe.

"We want to guarantee that insects, as we know them, will survive on this orb for another 70 million generations," spoke a preying mantis whom Merri did not recognize. "Think of it as an insurance policy for the future of our species."

O.K., I'm in," accepted Merri.

"Then I suppose it's time to introduce to you your new colleagues. You already know Robe and Lutz, so let me introduce you to the other fourteen members of the team," advanced Gernessy. "On your left, the one whom just broadcast, is Flapper (a preying mantis); next to him his Ilathia (a queen bee); on her right is Sempda (a termite); on his right is Wernier (a common spy-i.e. a house fly); directly in front is Carlos (a Mexican fruit fly); on his left is Pythomias (a Mediterranean fruit fly); on her left is Arabia (a horsefly); on her left is Weber (a black widow); on her left is Long fellow (a daddy longlegs); on his left is Sapper (a worker ant); on his left is Stonly (a mud wasp); on his left is Dydgon (another spy); on her left is Feeder 12 (a feeder ant); and finally Queen Frisco (a queen ant)." They all exchanged various greetings with Merri.

"Why don't we get right down to business and brief Merri on the latest details. Sapper, will you broadcast to Merri last week's emergency meeting's minutes?"

"Sure," said the ant. "Last week we held the first meeting of insects to discuss the goings on of the war. We came to the conclusion that it wasn't going our way in the 'States. We are doing good in Canada and Mexico, but that's only because those nations have not used Tosbow. We decided to have another meeting today to answer the questions we came up with. The are as follows: (1) How long can we expect to last if the U.S. continues using Tosbow against us? (2) What are the chances Mexico and Canada will use Tosbow? (3) What will the final outcome be if we continue our present course? We couldn't answer any of these last meeting because of poor intelligence. Additionally, I proposed a fourth question be answered today or at the next meeting.

The question is, what is this young larvae in the U.S., and how will it's early development affect questions 1, 2, and 3," narrated Sapper.

"Very good Sapper. This forum is open for discussion," proclaimed Gernessy.

Robe asked to be recognized and he promptly was. "I'd like to address question number one. I've been talking with Farlan, and I have been assured that there is nothing we can do about T.S.O. Armed with this knowledge, I went to Pythomias and asked him to do a census on the current population of Insectland. He estimated it to be on the order of  $5 \times 10^{10}$ . Then I went back to Farlan and asked him to assume an unlimited supply of Tosbow were available to humans. Doing some mild calculations, we found that one wasp sting volume will kill 940 insects in 2.4 beats. Dividing our population by 940 insects per 2.4 beats, we came up with  $5.3 \times 10^7$  ~ wasp sting volumes of Tosbow to kill all of us within  $2.2 \times 10^7$  ~ to do it in. Next, we divided this number by 3000 beats a sun travel and came up with 7358.7 days. If we divide this number by 3640 sun travels per generation, we came up with the astonishing conclusion that all insects in Insectland will be dead in two generations."

Merri was the only one who was surprised. Everyone else was grateful, for their own number s had shown gloomily that it would take only a half of a generation to exterminate their kind.

"Very good Robe," applauded Gernessy. "We now know the answer to question number one. I would like to comment on your analysis though. Assuming  $5.3 \times 10^7$  ~ wasp sting volumes of Tosbow, how does that relate in human terms?"

"I can answer that," claimed Wernier.

"Go ahead," allowed Gernessy.

"Take  $5.3 \times 10^7$  ~ and do some calculations, and you come up with about 10,000 kilograms are needed to wipe us out. I have personally seen hundreds of 750 kilo dispensers in warehouses, so I don't think Tosbow is the limiting agent," answered Wernier.

"What is?" asked Merri.

"Insects," came the forlorn reply. There was silence for a while, until Gernessy started things rolling again.



"Let's address question two," he proposed.

"I think the chances are good that the Mexican Government will use I.S.O. if we get much further," put forth Carlos.

"What are the odds?" asked Gernessy.

"80 percent."

"I can say with certainty that Canada will begin using it soon. I heard Washington instructing the Canadian Ambassador on it's usage the other day," announced Dydgon.

"And I 'ye heard that the Independent Russian States have developed something similar to the toxin," claimed Stonly.

"So, that brings us to question three," proposed Gernessy.

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"I think we'll be lucky if we last 1 generation," claimed Sempda. "The information Robe used assumed insects were being killed 940 by 940. We all know this is not the case. The humans are, if anything, killing 1 by 200. They seem obsessed with over doing the job. It's taking them longer than one beat to kill 940 insects."

"I disagree," countered Arabia. "I think we can last at least two generations. The Canadians won't use Tosbow . they're concerned with the environmental effects. We will, therefore, be able to gain significant territory, or sue for peace at a reasonable cost."

"Bullshit. No one's suing for anything. There's no guarantee it will last," protested Weber.

"Everyone's entitled to their opinion, even if it is wrong," retorted Arabia.

"Quiet you two," ordered Gernessy. "There's no room for that B.S. in this forum."

"I think we'll survive the war, and not only that, but we'll be able to live in peace alongside the humans," claimed Merri.

"Impossible," spoke Feeder 12.

"Yeah, we can't live with them, we're incompatible. This *is* the fourth war we've fought with them since '21," said Ilathia.

"I think we ought to sue for peace now," said Sapper.

"We can't do that! The populace would revolt against our leader," warned Wernier.

"I'll personally suck the blood of anything that sues for peace," threatened Weber.

"You and who else," defended Stonly.

"Leave him alone, Stonly," inputted Dydgon.

"Stop it all of you," said Carlos worried. "you're acting like we used to before unification."

"He's right," supported Pythomias.

"Look," interceded Merri. "I tell you we can survive this war and be better off than ever before."

"How?" asked Flapper.

"Let me address question number one first. We know there's an internal struggle going on inside the 'States. I have met with a member of the young larvae group who are attempting to leave the ruler ship of the adults. He is a member of a hive they call SFInFE. He assures me that if they are successful, the war against us will be halted, and we will be able to negotiate some kind of treaty with them. Unfortunately, their goals cannot be won without our aid," he explained.

"Screw 'em," said Weber.

"Listen. I have opened the possibility to bring about a favorable end to this war and all you want to do is kill yourselves over the next one or two generations. Well you can go to San Andreas, because I'm going to try my hardest towards my aim. All I want to know is: are you with me or against me."

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"That's it, let me at him," sneered Weber.

"You make one move and I'll crush your legs," threatened Flapper as he grabbed Weber with his powerful mandibles.

"But he's a traitor," argued Weber. "You heard he wants to end the war!"

"We're all traitors Weber, otherwise we wouldn't be meeting in secret like this," pleaded Gernessy.

"He talks like Pilnick," observed Merri. Suddenly, the whole group seized upon that thought.

"That's right, I'm one of the MM. I hope Pilnick feeds you to his 'Supersects' as you've coined them. In one generation he'll control all of Insectland and the war will really begin, after all, Tosbow has no effect on **us**."

That statement shocked everyone, for the idea of "Supersects" was previously just an idea. Now here was one in the flesh. Suddenly, he leaped from Flapper's grasp right towards Stonly. Stonly stood frozen with fear. Weber's mandible opened, set to spring shut like a mouse trap. Stonly began his takeoff. It was too late, Weber's monstrous mandibles clamped down on Stonly's left leg. Stonly swung around using his clamped leg as an axis of rotation, and landed atop Weber. Weber tightened his grip, and Stonly's leg snapped off. Stonly revved up his stinger and plunged it into Weber's abdomen, releasing a standard volume of poison. Weber burst out laughing. Stonly pulled out the stinger and plunged it in again, releasing still more toxin. It was the moment Weber was waiting for. She pushed off and Stonly and her flew through the air, landing upside down on the ground. Weber clamped her mandible around Stonly's head, decapitating it quickly. Though without command, Stonly's stinger kept stinging the cold air.

"Who's next," asked Weber. No one said anything. "I thought as much. You're all chicken shits."

"I'd rather be a chicken shit and live to see another day than to be a genetic reject like yourself," yelled someone.

"Who said that," asked Weber furiously.

"I did," announced Merri as he stepped from behind a blade of grass. "Let's see what you've got, bitch," toyed the male version which all black widows devoured after sex.

Weber charged at Merri, her temper furious. Merri knew what was coming, and he prepared for it. When Weber came and began her powered pounce, Merri slid left and did a flip, so as to lie on his back. Weber tried to compensate for Merri's changed position, but instead only resulted in tumbling through midair and landing away from Merri. Getting up, she quickly charged anew at Merri. Good, he coming, thought Merri. Weber came on and jumped on top of Merri, grabbing Merri's leg with her mandibles. Ignoring the intense pain in his leg, Merri clamped his own pair of jaws around Weber's neck. Weber was taken by surprise by the adept athletic ability of her prey. He sliced off Merri's leg effortlessly, and she tried to push away from him. With Merri's grip tightening, Weber had little time left to react. Knowing she

was stronger, she gripped Merri's neck, and the two were locked in a death grip. Everyone watched with fascination as the two struggled for an advantage. Who would win? Merri had established his

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lock earlier and Weber had just been involved in another battle. But Weber was stronger, and all things being equal, she would be the winner. She began to black out, and in a final effort, clamped down as hard as she could. Merri tightened his grip even as he began to lose consciousness. He heard a loud snap, and was relieved to feel Weber's severed head. But wait. Was Merri delirious, or was Weber's grip tightening? It was. Merri tried desperately to push away the decapitated but still functioning head away, but he heard another snap, and his whole left side of his body became numb. Weber's mandibles then relaxed, and the head rolled to the ground near the now motionless Merri.

"Is he alive?" asked Carlos, looking at the juices oozing from the side of Merri's neck.

"It appears so, confirmed Gernessy.

"We'd better help him."

"Where's he live?" asked someone.

"I know where. We'd better take him and get help," said Gernessy. He arranged a detail to take Merri to his home web. It would take a while to get there, and even longer for news of Weber's death to get back to Pilnick. Would Merri be alive to take his wrath, wondered Gernessy.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

General Glen Penard Walthers was dreaming happily until he was awakened by a call from his deskcorn.

"What is it?" he asked sleepishly. A few high pitched sounds greeted his question. His mind blurred, he asked the other side to repeat what they had said. When they did so, he could tell the sounds were a dialect of insectese.

"We need to talk with you Mr. Ambassador."

"What do you want," he said not really in the mood to discuss diplomacy at the moment.

"We want to contact a human by the name of Louie LaSalle."

"I'll be down in a few minutes," he said as he rushed to get his clothes on. Arriving at the consultation room, he was greeted by two spiders, an ant, and a yellow jacket. The yellow jacket was doing the speaking.

"Mr. Ambassador, do you know of a spider named Merri?" asked Gernessy, his voice cornpulated.

"I don't believe I do," lied Glen.

"Can you place us in contact with Louie LaSalle?" they asked.

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"Sure, I'll try," said Lee as he called up a directory from his pocom. Finding the number, he printed it out and waited for someone to answer. After a few minutes, the call was answered.

"Hello," said the heavily acented voice on the other end.

"This is Ambassador Walthers calling from inside Insectland. There are a few insects here who request an audience with a Louie LaSalle."

"What are their names?" asked the voice.

"Hold on, I'll ask them," he said as he asked for their names.

"We're Gernessy, Robe, and Lutz. We're friends of Merri's."

"Where's Merri?" asked the voice.

"He's been wounded very badly during a stuggle with a member of the MM. We ask your medical assistance in helping to return him to us.

LaSalle considered this a few minutes before answering. "I should be able to come down tomorrow?" he said.

"Thank you," said Gernessy.

"What kind of shape is he in?" he asked.

"He has nervous system damage and is unconscious."

"O.K., I'm on my way there. Wait for me," instructed Louie as he collected some supplies and headed for the embassy.

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**CHAPTER NINE**

I was startled into a state of awakenedness by the loud sound of klaxons going off. Immediately I fell into the old familiar battle routine, but to my despair, I couldn't find any combat gear. I then realized why. This wasn't '27, it's '50. I'm a General now in command of a fighter squadron. I put on my flight uniform and ran to the briefing room. When I entered the brightly lit room, the thirty pilots rose and came to attention. When I took my seat, they followed suit.

General Mely was situated before us, about ready to speak. We had served in the same unit together during '41. He and I were two of only three survivors. I respected him greatly for his combat abilities. There were many times when we owed each other our lives.

General Mely rose to address the group assembled before him. "Let me introduce to you the Squadron Commander for today's flight," he said with pride in his voice. "His name is General Joeles. He served with this unit from '28 'til '43, and has logged over 50,000 **actual** flight hours in P.O.L. fighters. He will be leading today's attack against the Romanov Eleven Station. General Joeles," he introduced me, his hand outstretched.

I rose from my chair, and walked quickly towards him. As I covered the few steps required to make the transit, I thought back to the days of old. Romanov Eleven was abandoned right after the war of '41, I thought. Why would it be a target, unless this was just a training mission for my benefit? If it was only a training mission, I would have to alter my plans a bit. There was only one way to find out for sure. I grasped his hand firmly, and shook with the vigor of old friends whom I had not seen each other for a very long time. Releasing my grip, I turned towards the assembled men and waited for General Mely's briefing to continue.

"Romanov Eleven was attacked and captured three hours ago by that rebel trash SFInFE. We have received at 0813 World Standard Time a formal **declaration of war** from them. Since that time, they have emplaced an embargo on Earth and are interdicting supplies between space and terra. We have been ordered by Washington, in concert with the U.N., to attack Romanov Eleven and use it as a staging base for our attack against their headquarters. **Libra Station.**"

Libra Station? My mind reeled, remembering the events of the past thirty hours or so. While it seemed possible that we could have done what Mely said, I doubted we could have actually carried an attack like that out. I listened with great interest to the plan of attack as outlined by George. It ended with the usual act of no one asking questions, well, that is except for me.

"Excuse me, General, "I said to George after the others had left. "What will I be flying? I haven't even done any sim time in a S.T.L., and it's been years since I've flown an **Eagle** ?"

"I knew that. We brought old number eighty one out of retirement, just for you," smiled the general.

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That's cool, I thought. I needed familiarity right now in my predicament. I knew the '34 **Eagle** P.O.L. number eighty one like the postman knows your wife. She was the first ship I flew, and the last. It was the only plane to have the same pilot from corn to decom. That said a lot about the plane **and** the pilot flying it. She was the last of a breed, born at the height of the military confrontation between Russia and the United States of America. They had an excellent thrust to mass ratio, could pull more G's than the body could absorb, and were the last space assets to be hardened against E. M. P. (Electromagnetic Pulse Radiation effects from thermonuclear detonations). I hoped it could keep up with the next generation '48 S.T.L. **Stiletto**s the other pilots would be flying.

Arriving at the hanger, the size of the **Stiletto**s impressed me. My **Eagle** was dwarfed by the larger offspring. Only two years old, the **Stiletto**s still had teething problems though. They went straight from the one prototype to production, and many of the Block A models were relegated to R.P.V. (Remotely Piloted Vehicles) Squadrons (no pilot felt safe in them .they were nicknamed the "diving arrow" because when the software failed as it often did in atmosphere, the plane broke up). But the newer Block B, and now Block C upgrades had taken care of those deficiencies. The Skunk works at Sundstrand-TRW-Lockheed had done a wonderful job of integrating stealth characteristics into an airframe which due to it's severe operating environment was inherently unstealthy. How they reduced the infra-red signature from the hydrogen slush fueled scramjets was beyond my ability to divine.

As I did the preflight walk around, my hands caressed the titanium skin of my old friend. My 15 L.E.A. (Larger Euro-Asian) '34s and numerous sat kills were emblazoned, still looking as fresh as if painted yesterday, on the nose. I climbed into the machine, and closed the metal canopy. The Polar-Orbital Sciences-Loral **Eagles** were the first ships utilizing virtual reality view screens as necessitated by the impracticality of using transparent medium in the high lase threat experienced by fighters. The same principal was now employed in transports and TAVs everywhere. I harnessed myself securely into the cockpit. I had seen too many rookie pilots get their eggs broken from not being netted properly. As I went through the preflight checkout, I remarked upon how much more advanced this old bird was than even my '50 Ganemede Speedster trans I leased was. But then a trans was meant to be flown only in atmosphere, it was not a TAV.

The countdown began, and as the last few seconds ran off, I tensed up and prepared myself for the onslaught of Gs. At zero hour, the twelve redundant computers kicked on the jettisonable SRBs, sending my craft and I hurtling at eight Gs. I looked at my scope and could see the others leaving the station and attempting to catch up. As the Gs' built up to 10.2, the SRBs were jettisoned, and the craft reached it's cruise speed.

With the navcom already instructed as to where the destination was, I had time to reminisce about the old days. I reflected upon seeing a young hot-shot pilot, emotional from my first kill. I'd seen many of my friends die, and I wanted revenge against the russkies. Sitting in this very fighter, I'd fly out and strafe all of the russkie sats. It was a dangerous job, as most of them contained on-board proximity mines, which all too often took the aggressor out along with the target. If I was lucky, I'd get to tango with a L.E.A. **Firedart**. Each mission would last about ten hours, and when we returned we would go to the nearest club and party like it was our last night alive (for many, it was). With all of the memories flooding



back to me, it was not surprising

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that when I saw a vintage L.E.A. I immediately instructed the atcom to initiate the combat program and began my run.

I kicked on the glowers and gained a few meters per second over my prey. Either the bandit didn't know I was behind it, or he was playing with me. I backed off the thrust and slowed to a few centimeters per second gain over it. I was within attack range, signaled the atcom. Still, the bogie did not try to evade, and the sense of fun began to diminish. This is no fun, I thought. I kicked on the glowers and flew past him (an often suicidal maneuver). Still, the target took no action. I was beginning to wonder. I hadn't realized it, but I was being hailed incessantly, against all orders. I acknowledged.

"General, we show you as being in attack mode against that *Firedart*. It's not '41 you know. Break off the..."

General? Not '41? Break off? Glancing at the view screen, I found before me a ***Firedart***, cross hairs centered on the fuselage, weapons on, ready to go. The fog cleared and I immediately aborted the program, and reset the cocom to the mission profile as programmed. That L.E.A.s lucky someone broke radio silence, I remarked to myself

"This is Eagle Four acknowledging. Thanks for waking me up hot-shots. I took a little trip back to 2041 for awhile. Eagle Four out."

"I'll be sure to put myself on report for breaking R.D. silence," came the reply from the voice I recognized as belonging to my wing man.

"Nothing doing, son. Officially, nothing happened out here. We've got a mission, now lets do it," I pressed.

About half of an hour later, we arrived at our formation area. Simultaneously, all of the fighters in my squadron formed into a three staged staggered nine arrow formation. I instructed the atcom to fire off a few rounds of the HVG (Hyper Velocity Gun) as a test. Even though I told the atcom to set proximity fuses for a five second burst, the craft seemed unaffected by the propulsion of the depleted uranium rounds. Still, after five seconds, the screen showed the customary burst as expected.

We neared the target, and I pressed the attack. I aimed some H.V.M.s at the base of the command module and instructed the atcom to fire. The missiles slid off their rails and crashed into the station. Explosive decompression, coupled with the detonation of the missiles, obliterated the entire module. Other modules were similarly destroyed.

I was hailed on the radio. The station was surrendering.

"Let us board," I demanded.

"Proceed to hanger X-1,Y-2, **Z-0**," was the reply.

I flew my craft close to the station, initiating a reconn of the area before I landed. As I flew past, I noticed the old Red Squadron emblem painted freshly on the otherwise weathered station skin. The Red Squadron used to play the aggressor role during the 20's through the 40's. Seeing this, coupled with my belief that this station was abandoned years ago reaffirmed my belief that this was just a training mission. That being the case, I would not be armed.

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I kicked on the glowers and formed up behind my wing man. I instructed the atcom to give me tone, and in two seconds my cockpit resounded with the tone of the HVG's guidance system acquiring the target. I fired. My screen exploded with fire as the *Stiletto* before me disintegrated.

"What the hell!" yelled my wing man, angry that he had been "killed" and his controls were inoperative now. But he was still alive, and his ship undamaged. Only the computers didn't know that.

"O.K. boys, we waxed their tails, good job. Now to rebrief you on your *real* mission. Now I know what you were briefed by George, but he didn't think it wise to tell you the true nature of our mission until we completed this little 'exercise'. Our mission is to fly to Libra Station and use it as our staging area. I am sending the coordinates through your acorns now, so your navcorns will be set right. Onward to Libra Station," I exclaimed.

I loaded the coordinates into their acorns, and watched for confirmation that they acceded to my orders. They willingly did so. I was relieved that pilots were still trained to follow orders, rather than acting as individuals. If they had been actually armed, and any of them were mavericks, my plan would not succeed.

As we neared Libra Station, I raised them on the lascom.

"Come in Libra, this is Jaffrin."

"Roger Jaffrin, this is Libra. What's the 1FF. for today?" asked the voice dispassionly.

"Pentel," I answered.

"Roger that Jaffrin. What do you want?"

"I have two dozen unsuspecting pilots here as a present to the big guy," I remarked.

"Roger that. What is your ETA."

"Five minutes."

"Roger that. Will have party when you arrive. Libra out."

Five minutes later, we arrived at Libra and flew a reconn past. Then we landed in various hangers, met by official looking guards. When the unsuspecting pilots egressed from their craft, they were surrounded and stockaded until after the war. I told Linda about Washington's plans, and an emergency meeting of the Fourth Congress was immediately called. When all of the delegates were assembled to discuss the situation, we waited for the "Unifier" to show up. After twelve minutes, we found his TAV gone, and decided to start without him. Everyone wondered where he could be at a time like this...

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## **CHAPTER TEN**

It had been a long time since he had seen Merri. Merri was a remarkable spider. For having such a minuscule brain, he seemed to have more common sense than some humans Louie knew. And now he needed my help, thought Louie. And Louie needed Merri's help. Merri was one of the few insects capable of coexisting with Homo Sapiens. This coexistence was a goal that Louie had to accomplish before SFInFE's ultimate goal could be achieved. We must make peace with the life on our planet before we can hope to exist in the universe with other beings, he believed. But first things first and that was unifying the world into one homogenous entity, capable of rallying for the stars.

Louie LaSalle looked behind at the medical gear he had brought. He had been a surgeon not too long ago and achieved the first successful brain transplant back in '34.

After that accomplishment and all of the laurels associated with such an historic event, Louie left the macro world of human anatomy and entered the micro world of the insects. It was research into brain transplants, that he arrived at a means of communicating with “lower” brains. Merri had been his most successful test subject

After various transplant operations, Merri’s neural networks became interwoven with the newly implanted neural tissue and accepted it as it’s own. Through a compulator which he invented, Louie and Merri established the first contact between different phylum’s. They conversed over many years, and each gained an understanding of the other’s lives and thought processes. It was during these early conversations that Merri gained many of the ideals that he holds now.

The process was a two way street. Louie gained valuable insight into the survival instincts and the ability to regenerate lost body parts which some lower forms were capable of. Unfortunately, when Merri was assimilated into the human’s advanced culture, he lost some of his older functions (i.e. the ability to regenerate). Thus, Louie came to help a good friend who was under duress.

After he landed at the embassy, he talked with Walthers (who had no idea that Louie was the “Unifier”) and the insects who had brought Merri there. Taking stock of the situation, Louie acted quickly and immediately began the operation to save the spider’s life. Two hours later, his task complete, Louie provoked the arachnid into a state of consciousness.

“Where am I,” asked the little spider, dizzy from the anesthesia.

“Woah, hold on there fella. You’re all right, I fixed you up,” proclaimed Louie.

Merri rose and tested his new leg. It worked, as did his formerly paralyzed side, confirming that the surgeon had done a good job as usual. “Yes you did,” he said.

“Can we be alone,” asked Louie, glancing at the other insects. They quickly left.

“I hear you’ve joined an anti-war group and that you want my help. I need help too. Perhaps we can make a deal?” hoped the “Unifier”.

“Depends. What have you got going?” asked the intrigued spider.

“It’s like this. I hear you think you can actually survive this war. I know that you can only do so with my help. But, the only way I can help you is if you aid me.”

“Let me guess. If I help you gain control of Washington, you’ll end this?” asked Merri.

“Not only that, but I’ll bring the insects into full equality with humanity,” he offered.

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“I’m glad I chose the path I did. You know, when I was unconscious, I dreamt of a time when humans and insects cooperated together. Not only that, but *all* life on this planet was linked into a sort of planetary consciousness. Do you think SFIInFE will undertake this as a goal?”

“I guarantee that by the time this war’s over, all life on this planet will be united. Deal?”

“Yes,” exclaimed Merri happy at the new partnership which would forever change the existence of life on Earth.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

.so let me say again, we now have the means to take control, so lets seize this opportunity and bomb the hell out of Washington. With these thirty fighters, we have enough destructive power to take over the entire Western Hemisphere. Once this has been accomplished....”

Big fucking deal, I mused silently to myself Severly’s been talking, or filibustering, for the past two and a half hours. He just keeps saying the same thing *.bomb the world and we shall be free.* I looked around and saw most of the delegates were asleep. This wouldn’t be happening if the “Unifier” were here, as I wished it so.

pilot the fighters to within ten kilos of the target and let the navtak systems do the rest. Assuming twenty five rockets per fighter, and one rocket per city, we can devastate over 600 cities across...” he droned ceaselessly.

The door to the chamber opened and in stepped our savior.

.oops. And that’s all I have to say,” quickly summed up Al Severly as he practically ran off the platform. The delegates began to awaken.

Louie walked over to the platform and waited for everyone to awaken before speaking. “My fellow delegates... I have just returned from an illuminating meeting Stateside. Upon my return, I found my usual docking space occupied with a *Stiletto*, assuring me that Mr. Jaffrin successfully completed his assigned mission. We now have the tools necessary to complete the next phase of our struggle.”

“I have talked with some insects from the U.S. front lines, and they tell me the planes which fly overhead dropping Tosbow are the same ones Paul acquired for us...

At the mention of insects a few people gasped, apparently unaware that it was possible to communicate with them.

.so with a little paint job and a whole lot of luck, we can infiltrate our planes into the U.S. forces and **accidentally** dispense Tosbow over a populated area...

He was met by an almost unanimous gasp from the assembly.

“Now I know you realize Tosbow will likely kill most of those people exposed to it, but think of the political effects it will have. Why to have their own government poison them will surely cause people to revolt and overturn the present leaders. The spraying of Tosbow will be halted, and the insects will be able to do their thing. Within days, Washington will be ours, and afterwards, Canada, Mexico, gaining momentum after each nation dissolves into anarchy, until finally the whole world is ours...!” he expelled proudly, full of the power emanating from within.

Everyone applauded him and gave him a standing ovation.

“Oh, and one more think,” continued Louie in an more sinister tone. “The next time I leave, I don’t want to find any filibustering going on. It’s against the Compact, and I will prosecute the moron who does it.,” he leered towards Severly.

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“O.K., now on to operational matters. We have to act fast. According to the reports I’ve received, the U.S. has told it’s forces that we’ve declared war. They have prepared to attack us, and were it not for our cue from Chairman of the J.C.S. Severly, we would now be but molecules floating in orbit. I’m putting Paul Jaffrin in command of the next mission. You’ll get your briefing from him after I’ve consulted with him

about the missions you'll be undertaking. I leave you with one phrase of advice .Act fast, don't sit on your ass!" and with that Louie walked briskly off the stage, and motioned for me to follow.

"This closes the Fourth Congress..." said Specanner Jan Talea as she slammed the gavel against the desk.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

President Tomar Burton was feverously battling a salmon when his pocom buzzed. He ignored it's call and continued the battle. The eighteen kilogram salmon was putting up one heck of a fight, but Tomar was a good fisherman. He slowly reeled the pink salmon closer. The pocom buzzed again. Tomar reached into his pocket and pulled the little computer out, acknowledging the request.

"Mr. President," began the voice on the other end. "General Aloni of the J.C.S. wants to speak with you .priority one flash," a sense of urgency was present in the voice.

"What's the code word for today?" asked Tomar nonchalantly. Aloni had been known to scream priority one to his underlings for an anti-acid.

"Croesus," came the serious reply.

At the mention of the dreaded code word Croesus, the President dropped his reel and ran to his Presidential trans, calling for his aides panicly. Within seconds the trans flew over the Maine pines and landed near the President. The canopy swung open and Tomar climbed in and harnessed himself securely. As soon as he was harnessed, Alan Stuzman kicked on the SRBs and they were on their way to the staging area.

"The TAVs waiting for you at Thomas Air Force Base. E.t.a.'s about four minutes away," announced his aide.

"Good. Patch me through to Aloni," ordered the President.

"Roger," said Alan as he made the connection.

"General, this is Burton. What's the deal?"

"It's Croesus, Sir. I received a formal declaration of war thirteen minutes ago from SFInFE," he explained.

"Are we in imminent danger?"

"It doesn't appear so at this moment. However, I have placed our armed forces on worldwide alert."

"Only I can do that General," scolded the President.

"I tried to reach you Mr. President. After three minutes of trying, I gave up and tried to reach the Vice President. I couldn't reach him either, and since Speaker Mead died three days ago, there's no one left in the political line of succession. So in effect, I was in charge at the white house." Those words echoed a former Secretary of State during the Reagan era, remembered Tomar. His aide signaled to him that they were preparing to land.

"Hold on General, I'm transferring to my TAV. We'll pick this up when inside. Tomar out."

"Aloni out."

Alan landed the trans about twenty meters away from the waiting TAV. They unharnessed themselves and jogged over to the vehicle. Two Space Command SPs were waiting for them at the steps of a ladder leading up to the canopy.

"Welcome aboard, Sir," said one of them as the two dignitaries made their way quickly up the steps. Once inside and secured, the guards entered the craft, and the pilot began his takeoff

"Alan, I want you to convene an emergency meeting of Congress right away, under the Croesus contingency. See what you can do," the President forced out as he fought the rapid buildup of G forces.

"Roger, it's in works," he said.

"Get the J.C.S. to *Sanctuary* as well. I'll need a briefing by them and the N.S.A."

"Check." Alan entered the commands, and within seconds he received a reply. "J.C.S. is sending General Walthers to brief us," he informed his superior.

"Good. Have you ever been to ***Sanctuary?***" asked Tomar.

"No, I thought that was mothballed after President Gilbert left it when '41 was over," expressed the aide.

"They even have you in the dark, eh, Alan? Well, I'll tell you. The N.S.A.'s had people there continuously since the place was constructed in '24. I'll bet most of the congressmen didn't even know about it until they opened their briefing packages," guessed the President.

Alan just shook his head affirmatively.

"What's out ETA.?" asked Tomar.

"Less than seven minutes, Sir," said the pilot. "We're about to enter communications blackout, so don't be alarmed," he cautioned.

Tomar leaned back in his chair nervously. He hoped SFInFE didn't attack while he was in excommunicato.

"What do you mean he's not going to be here for another thirty minutes? Doesn't he know what Croesus means?" scolded the President.

"Mr. President. If Congress had not vetoed our last budget request, we would have had the money to provide General Walthers with a TAV. It's a damn shame on this government that he had to fly his own trans. What if he didn't own one?" asked the Chairman of the National Security Agency.

"Thank you Tu. I'll see what I can do for your next year's budget. Burton out."

Tomar turned and spoke to his Vice President. "You know Tom, we're going to have to do something about the N.S.A. They're getting too cocky again," commented the President.

"I know Tomar. What do you say we start without this Walthers guy. I'm, sure it'll bust his ego."

"Splendid idea my friend. I do believe you're getting a streak of intelligence in you. Where have you been keeping it all of these years?" joked the President.

"Ask your wife," shot back the Vice President. They exchanged glances, seeking to ascertain the truthfulness of that barb. Then Tomar burst out laughing, to the relief of Thomas Cain, his Vice President. They both laughed and walked into the Congressional Shaft. As soon as the President sat, the meeting began.

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

At the same time as the Congressional meeting convened, the Unifier and several guests gathered in the command module and peered out the window, anxiously awaiting the final moments.

"There they go," observed Severly. The people turned their heads and followed thirty points of light speeding away from Libra, heading toward the Earth below.. After they disappeared from view, the Unifier turned to address the group.

"Friends..., a toast. To the gallant men and woman who are now on their way to change forever the world below us." And with that, everyone raised their glasses of champagne and drank heartily. After drinking all of the champagne, Louie sat down in his chair and prepared to transmit to the rest of the station. He switched on his deskcom and spoke to everyone on the station. "They have now entered Earth's atmosphere and are about twelve minutes from their targets. I would like to take a moment to share with you one of my experiences. Many years ago, while still a doctor, I was faced with a crucial decision. One that involved thousands of millions of lives. It was after the war of '41, and I was in charge of the N.R.P.- the National Recovery Program, Medical Division. I had two choices proposed to me about what to do with the wounded survivors of the nuclear exchange that occurred. One was, treat them in accordance with traditional methods and have about sixty-four percent of them live a life of misery. The second, was to implant a newly developed genetic code into the patient's cells, hoping it would counter act the effects of radiation. In the tests we had already conducted on animals and in computer studies, when it worked, there was a 94 percent chance of total recovery and the prospect of a happy and full life down the road for many years. The problem was, it had never been tested on humans before. After much thought, I felt the benefits outweighed the risks, and I authorized it's administration to the survivors. Of those who did not reject the implants, 91 percent recovered fully. Only nine percent of those who received the new code died. I felt I made the right decision then, as I do now. Sure, many innocent people will die, but more will be better off because of the struggle. It is thus that I ask for a moment of silence, so that we may remember our loved ones. Reach out to those about to die, and let them know they aren't dying in vain..." After several minutes of intense concentration, he felt everyone reaching out to Earth. Contact! "Thank you," he said as he disconnected the link and turned to look out at the blue green planet above him. All of the invited guests too that as a sign to leave, and they did so accordingly. All but one, that is. Louie could see Cheryl's reflection off the glass and he motioned for her to sit next to him. She pulled her chair closer and reclined, revealing her nice curves. Louie looked at her for a few moments, reading her emotions carefully. When he looked into her eyes he was saddened by what she felt.



"I can empathize with you Cheryl," he offered softly. "I have a wife whom I love deeply down there. She's in one of the target zones. There's a 99 percent chance she'll die instantly. It's that damn one percent that bothers me," he confessed.

"I didn't know, I mean that you had a wife. Did you tell her?" She asked.  
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"This is the way she wanted to go. Stupid, if you ask me, but she wanted her death to bring about the rise of a new order, and be the spiritual martyr that is implied but such actions."

"What are the chances our strike force returns?" She asked hopeful.

"Slim. I didn't tell anyone, but basically, this is a suicide mission."

"Oh." Cheryl sat quietly staring out the window. She focused in the States and looked for a special person in a special place. Louie looked out also, thinking to himself about what to say. When he pieced everything together, he turned to her and spoke softly again.

"It's Paul, isn't it? What's going on between you two?" He asked.

"Yeah. I'm so mad, I didn't see him when I had the chance.. .no, I take that back, **chances**."

"We sometimes realize too late what we've lost," he observed.

"I know. Now I have a feeling I'm not going to see him again, and I never said good-bye."

"I'm sure he's thinking of you now. Besides, when he gets back, I'm sure you'll make it up to him."

"You think he'll be back?"

"Absolutely." They looked out the window again. Louie looked for and found the spot where his wife was. She's probably feeding the cats now, he thought as he glanced at his watch. And he slowly began to cry. He was not alone, for Cheryl soon joined him in a chorus.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

I was flying my old fighter, leading the thirty-odd *Stiletto*s and Pedro's '27 TAV in a cranked arrow formation towards our staging base. On the way through the atmosphere, we dumped our excess fuel, whereupon it promptly burst into flames on contact with the oxygen in the atmosphere. The ignited hypergolic fuel created a fierce heat source which scarred all of our vehicles, making them appear battle-damaged. As we neared the main staging area, we went into the standard landing pattern, and maneuvered the vehicles towards touchdown.

"Lithos, this is Overlooker damaged requesting landing and rearming clearance at Land ways, over," I initiated contact.

"Roger Overlooker damaged. What's I.F.F. for today?" Asked the tower command.

We all entered the 1FF codes we were given moments before our departure.

"Confirmed Overlooker damaged. You're clear for Land ways runway B-19, over."

"Roger Lithos." One after another, we touched down at the base while Pedro's stealthy TAV landed nearby. Within minutes we were swarmed by grounds crew whom were eager to find out about the action we saw. As they loaded Tosbow onto our planes, we all exchanged glowing reports of our activity against the rebel SFinFE trash. Due to operational security, the base knew nothing of our real identities.

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Eighteen minutes later, we were loaded and ready to go. We took off and initiated a nominal escape and re-flew over the base. When we were at the location expected of us, we went "silent" and had our planes taken out of sight by Pedro's bullets. Then we headed for our individual targets as set out by our navtak systems, each of us on our separate ways.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

.and the final tally is 534 for, 1 against. This nation is now at war," said the Vice President as he turned and looked at the President. He saw Tomar shake his head with an affirmation of the declaration of war. "Under the provisions of Croesus, you're all required to stay here for the duration of the war. This meeting is adjourned," said Thomas Cain as he slammed the gavel bringing the meeting to a close.

As the Congressmen left the shaft, Lee Roalnvoo was left with General Aloni and a few aides.

"General," began Lee. I personally know General Joeles. If what you said is true about his being in charge of the Overlooker Squadron, then I think we have a bigger problem than you realize."

"Oh?" Asked General Aloni.

"His real name is Paul Jafflin. I think he might be a member of the rebellious SFinFE group. I've heard him talk, and he agrees with quite a few of the avowed principals they state," confessed Lee acting as General Walthers.

"How long have you known this, Major?" Asked Aloni obviously upset at this hidden knowledge.

"General!" Interrupted an aide before Lee could answer. "We've been hit!"

"What?" yelled Aloni and Walthers in unison.

"Land ways was attacked at Lithos eight minutes ago. There's nothing left," the aide's voice dropped off.

"Get me General Mely!" boomed Aloni.

"Yes Sir," said the underling as General Mely's red face appeared on the deskcom's plasma display.

"General Aloni, what is the problem?" he asked fearful of the result.

"General, where is your fighter squadron?"

"I do not know, Sir. We lost contact with it four hours ago or so," he confessed.

"Why didn't you let me know this earlier?"

"You know it's SOP. to wait six hours before writing a report," issued Mely. "Did you know Land ways at Lithos was just destroyed?"

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"Impossible, those planes weren't armed when they left here," protested Mely.

"General Mely, prepare to be court-martialed," promised Aloni as he cut contact and then called the President.

"Mr. President, they've made the first move. What do you think?" He asked after briefing him on the events.

Tomar was silent for a few moments before answering softly. "I think we're about to be checkmated in two moves." His Vice President sat down and thought about what his boss said.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

After leaving the Land ways at Lithos, I headed for my brother's house near Odin, Florida. When I was within a kilo, I began to land the hidden **Eagle** at his pad. After doing so, I egressed as expected and went to the door and rang IVlike.

"Hey bro. How's it going?" asked my brother. "Was that you who made all of that noise?"

"Yeah, it certainly is a beast. Can I come in?" I asked hurriedly.

"Sure," he said as he led me inside his half spherical house. "So what brings you here?"

"I need a favor, Mike," I began.

"Anything man.

"I need to borrow a trans for a couple of hours or so."

"11mm. I only have five. Which one do you want?"

"Lets see, how about that Ganymede Speedster," I bartered.

"O.K., but it's the best one I have. You'd better take damn good care ofit," threatened Mike.

"Thanks Mike. I don't have much time, you know, its a national security issue," I lied.

"Sure, I understand. Here's the acorn .you'll need it to access the commands," he said as he handed me the device.

I took his acorn and called his trans to me. It was a beauty, the only prototype, and the fastest of the trans. The Ganymede Speedster of his was the envy of all fliers and I whom did not own one. I couldn't wait to try it out.

I thanked my brother and transferred some of the equipment from the P.O.L. to the trans. This was done out of sight of my brother, for him to see me load Tosbow onboard would have made him extremely upset. I parked the Eagle in Mike's garage, and told him to stay away from it .that it might still be contaminated with residue from the (auxiliary power units) APUs. Then I entered the Speedster, and harnessed myself in securely. I input the coordinates into the navcom and took off for my target .Washington D.C.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Otto Tachabana landed his *Stiletto* within a half kilometer of a Hertz Rent a Trans business. After a short walk, he arrived at the automated dispatcher and inserted a EMS card given him by Louie.

"Which trans would you like Otto?" asked the machine in a feminine vocal.

"I'll take a Mead, if you have one available," he answered.

After a few seconds, the machine replied in the affirmative, and dispensed an acorn.

"Here is your acorn to access the vehicle. It' is a blue '51 Mead, in spot number 30. Your charges have been automatically withdrawn from your account. Thank you for choosing Hertz and have a nice day," it said.

Otto grabbed the acorn and his ejected EMS card from the machine. Then he called the trans to him. He harnessed himself and flew to his parked vehicle. Then he commenced loading the Tosbow dispensers onto the rented trans. Minutes later, his task was complete. He loaded the coordinates of his target into the navcom and headed for his destination .Ottawa.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Pedro flew his TAV to his home in south central Tulary, Mexico. Upon landing, he exited the craft and slid his way to his house. Once inside, he went to his library and called up his bullet program from his deskcom. He accessed the Gips and had the bullet program seek out the signatures of his, Otto's, and my trans. When it found them, he ordered his virus to delete all references to the craft. He then tried to delete the pictobytes of the Stilettos, but was unsuccessful. His task complete, he called me.

"Jaffrin.," he began. "I've completed the *editing* you requested."

"Good. Did you block the others?"

"No, I couldn't get inside the restricted zone. It seems like they've got their own subroutine or something," he guessed.

"Looks like it's up to us then, 'eh Pedro?"

"Roger that. We'd better get a move on it. The shit's about to hit the fan real soon."

"Yep, Jaffrin out."

Pedro broke connection and loaded the Tosbow dispensers onto his '27 Omega transport. After harnessing himself securely, he input into the navcom the coordinates of his destination Mexico City.

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## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

Lee was going over a list of possible targets we might hit, when his deskcom rang with a sensation of urgency. "Walthers here, what is it?" He queried the person on the other end of the conversation.

"General, we think we've found them," he said referring to our stolen planes.

"How?" asked a perplexed Lee.

"Easy. All we had to do was tie into Gips the signatures of each Stiletto (which we of course have on file) and have Gips display where they currently are, their previous track, and their predicted destination," offered the intelligence expert.

"Are all of them accounted for?"

"Yes Sir, including the missing Eagle and what appears to be a shadowing Tav." "Good. Feed me the data, O.K.?"

"Sure," said the analyst as he fed the information to Lee's deskcom. Lee called General Aloni and told him of the news.

"General, we've found them," he said excitedly.

"Splendid. Where are they?" he asked hopeful at the sign of an advantage.

"I'm sending their locations through now," said Lee as he did so.

"Thanks," said his superior as he confirmed receiving all of the file downloaded to him.

Lee acknowledged, and broke connection. A sense of joy swept over him with the knowledge that he might have just thwarted SFInFE's plans. He called up the location of the **Eagle** I was flying. It was last seen at my brother's house. Lee knew I was a shrewd character, and he was worried about what I was up to. He called up a file on my brother and I and read them carefully. He needed to know how others in the government evaluated me. He did not want to be outwitted by a simple double agent like myself

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Dexter Semptat was flying as close to the ground as mechanically possible to avoid radar. His navcom instructed him that he was within range of his target. He switched his navtak system on and let it do the rest. The vehicle performed a standard pop-up maneuver and sprayed Tosbow over the city of Houston. After the job was conducted, the craft flew to the Houston Space Base twelve kilos away. Upon reaching attack range, the navtak system fired the plane's main

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armaments at the bunker where Tosbow was stored. It blew up explosively, a big green mushroom cloud vigorously rising.

His mission completed, he called the "Unifier" and told him of the good news. As he headed for base, his scope showed a bandit approaching rapidly. Dexter placed the cocom into the dogfight mode, and jinked his craft around, trying to gain an advantageous shot on the bogie. The bandit flew past him at a combined speed of Mach 15. Then the enemy pulled a tight twelve G turn and got on Dexter's tail. Dexter's lack of sufficient flight training was obvious. Suddenly, his plane began an uncontrolled dive to the ground below. He struggled to regain control, but could do nothing to counter-act the dive. From inside the cockpit boomed a foreign voice.

"We have regained control of our craft. You have two choices: return to base with me or crash and burn, pal," said the pilot of the other *Stiletto*.

All right, I surrender," gave in Dexter. The fighter ceased its dive and resumed a more normal flight eastwards. Dexter sat back in his seat, discontent with the idea that his plane was controlled from afar. After dawning upon the realization that his craft was being controlled via the acorns, Dexter acted to nullify the affect. Pulling out his sidearm, he shot the cocom where the acorn gains access to it. The plane was uncontrolled again. For a few brief moments, Dexter didn't understand why. Then he understood what he had done. By shooting out the acorn, he not only destroyed the ability of others to gain access to the flight controls, but he also destroyed how the pilot on board communicates with the cocom. With the link between man and machine gone, Dexter rode his *Stiletto* down to the ground in a scene reminiscent from Dr. Strangelove where Slim Pickins rode the bomb down to the target. You make the call as to whether Dexter was acting bravely or stupidly. He could have punched out (ejected) at any time during the fall.

Lieutenant Faber watched in horror as the Stiletto spun out of control, its pilot still onboard, and crashed into the desert ground below. He circled the crash site and took a few pictobytes to confirm what happened. Then he radioed to his commander an account of what happened.

"It's O.K. Lieutenant. I'm sure most of those rebels prefer suicide to capture. I'll bet their leaders have them so psyched up with anti-American propaganda, that they feel they're better off dead than read by the intelligence personnel."

"Should I inform the others of my squadron?"

"No. Let them face this on their own. You know, help them to grow up a bit," suggested the wing commander.

Faber broke connection and returned to base, his mission to take out the enemy finished.

Mike Jaffrin was watching the latest N.W. C. A. reports when he heard a noticeable rolling thunder approach from the west. He switched off the news tapes and went outside to investigate the noise. He searched the sky, but didn't see anything, so he returned inside to finish reading the

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forecast. He had barely turned the reader back on, when his house, the garage, and all of their contents were blown apart by two 2,000 pound laser guided bombs.



Louie was dreaming, hunched over his desk, about the mission, when a strange thought struck him. What if the Americans accessed the S.T.L.s through their acorns. Couldn't that result in them gaining control of the planes? He awoke abruptly as he confirmed to himself that possibility.

Accessing the latest Gips photos, Louie could see Dexter's *Stiletto's* remains. Continuing the process, he saw that every target of the fighters were attacked as planned, but that every S.T.L. had been destroyed. He had not heard from Otto, Pedro, or I for quite some time. He hoped we were all right.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Tomar Burton was having a problem getting used to the crampedness of *Sanctuary*. He had taken the proper dosage of medicine, but it did not seem to be working. So, it was not surprising when he viewed the pictobytes of the crashed S.T.L.s, the blown up house, and the contaminated cities, he promptly threw up. Ashamed, he excused himself and left for his private quarters, where he could puke in a more private surrounding. After vacuuming his excrement, the bell rang and the face of his Vice President, Thomas Cain, appeared on the deskcom.

"Come in," he offered as he quickly tossed aside the hose from the vacuum cleaner.

"I've got some good news Tomar. General Aloni has canceled Croesus. We're free to go," said the V.P.

"Good. I'll be happy to get back to D.C.," confessed the President.

"Shall I ready a Tav for your return?" queried Thomas.

"As soon as possible."

"Figure out what you're going to tell the public?" questioned his friend.

"About the I.S.O.?"

"Yeah."

"I haven't even given that any thought yet," he confessed as he fought to keep from puking again.

"From what I hear, the survivors are restless, if you know what I mean," warned the Vice President.

"Then I'd better start acting *presidential* and get back to D.C.," ordered Tomar. The two of them exited the room and made their way to the waiting TAV.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Pedro had been doing recons of Mexico City for several days, awaiting the insect's advance. When they were within one kilometer of the city, he commenced Tosbow dispersion. The population below was decimated, creating a vacuum which the insects eagerly filled. His mission complete, Pedro headed for Libra Station, unaware that his craft was being tracked by secretly developed orbital surveillance assets of Space Command. Minutes later, his transport was obliterated by a quick pulse from an orbiting *Meteor* class battle station. He had less of a chance than the now dying Mexicans below him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The President was busy rehearsing his upcoming speech when his aide interrupted him and told him he had two minutes to air time. Grabbing the disk with his prepared speech on it, he left the inner sanctum of his room and walked to the Blue Room, where the C.V. cameras were set up. Sitting behind the huge oak desk, he inserted the disk of his speech into the deskcom, and his words appeared on the TelePrompTer for him to read. He awaited nervously the final moments before his broadcast. After a brief introduction by his Vice President, the signal was given for him to begin.

"My fellow Americans," he began. "I do not have to tell you that we are losing this last great battle against the insects. There have been millions and millions of you killed collaterally. The insects are within 50 kilos of the Capitol, and many of your democratically elected leaders have fled to safer locations. But I will not abandon the White House while still acting as your President and Commander-in-Chief. Before I get to that, I have to tell you why we are fighting this war.

"Not only are we fighting a war against the insects, but we are also fighting amongst ourselves for the first time in two centuries. I have seen the devastated cities of Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis, and New York. I don't know what to say, except that I am deeply sorry. We entered this war sure that we would prevail against the insects. We are ending this war with SFInFE and them united against us. Theirs is a noble goal, but because of what they stand for, our present form of a democratic

republic is incapable of supporting their proposed system of rule. It would have been far easier if SFInFE had made allowances for retaining our system of government, but that is impossible..." he continued.

Lee was watching the President's speech when he was interrupted by a call from the Elysium.  
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"Walthers here. What have you got," he asked irritated at the interruption.

"We just completed our report on the Jaffrin bombing. Sir. There was only one body, that of Michael Jaffrin. We found the P.O.L. Paul was flying, but one of Mike's is missing..."

Lee's mind raced. Could I have been so sinister that I would set my own brother up, he wondered.

"Thanks Brewer, I'll get back with you later," he said

Another call came through his line immediately after disconnecting the previous one.

"Walthers here, what is it?"

"General, Mexico City's been attacked!"

"What?"

"Sir, according to the latest report from **Aurora**, a transport initiated a Tosbow run over the capital when the insects were within a kilo. The city's in the hands of the insects now."

"Damn!" was all Lee could think of, his mind overloaded with the scale of what was happening.

"At least **Aurora** was able to hand off to **Meteor**. The transport was confirmed destroyed," acknowledged Tu.

"Thanks Tu, I'll need a report later."

Lee leaned back in his chair, analyzing all of the data he acquired in just the last few minutes. Then it suddenly and horrifically dawned upon him what was about to occur.

"Get me the President, Flash priority double A," he prodded.

.and it is thus that I formally declare my resignation from the Office of the President of the United States of America. Thomas Cain will be sworn in as the new President immediately following this broadcast,” announced Tomar Burton.

Alan burst into the room and literally grabbed the President and yanked him out of his chair. “Let’s go, no time to explain,” he brushed off the former President’s protests. They quickly made their way out of the room and headed for the Presidential TAV.

Flying down Pennsylvania Avenue, I was impressed with the beauty of D.C. I was not here to sightsee, however, for I had a solemn job to do. Louie LaSalle trusted no one other than I to accomplish the task at hand. As I flew over the White House, I could see three people running for a TAV. I commenced my run and dispensed Tosbow over the city below. The running men never made it to their vehicle.

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## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

“...and that basically describes my part in the scheme of things during the war *of’50*,” I narrated somberly, reflecting upon the great loss of life that occurred throughout the world as unity was brought to the planet.

“You may be seated,” ordered the Judge.

I left the witness stand and sat next to Lee.

A few minutes went by as the Judge/Prosecutor/Jury deliberated my testimony. It seemed like an eternity to me. Then, with a look of intense thought on his face, the judge formed the proper words.

“On this second anniversary of the formation of the United Earth Foundation, we should all reflect upon the sacrifices that were made to bring the world into harmony. Not only are we better off as a

species for adopting the principals as chartered in our Compact, but the planet as a whole is better off as well. Today, all life on Earth is represented in our Universal Congress. Our planet's biogenetic diversity is being restored. The environment is regaining it's health. The world standard of living has increased dramatically. The world population has been reduced to a more comfortable level of three billion. Hunger is an extinct condition. Fusion has brought power to the formerly undeveloped nations of the world. With recent advances in anti-matter propulsion, the solar system's resources are ours for the taking. The world's scientists are united under a common administration," the judge checked off the changes that have occurred as a result of the unification of the earth's nations into one homogenous society.

"We have people like Paul Jaffrin to thank for this accomplishment. As your leader, I felt it was time to tell the story of our founding," continued the judge.

Leader? The crowd was intrigued by the statement, as was I.

"Yes, I, Louie LaSalle, President of the United Earth Foundation, called this trial so that the true story of the birth of the U.E.F. could be told. Now we can begin humanity's next great challenge . the voyage to the stars" said the judge as he took off his robe and shut off a pseudofacial projection. The judge became Louie, and the reporters stood and gave a standing ovation to him. "So on this second anniversary, I proclaim today an international holiday. A party will be held shortly afterwards. This 'case' is dismissed," he decried as he slammed the gavel on the bench.

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## **EPILOGUE**

"You sure as hell had me scarred for awhile Louie," I confessed.

"Well how else was I to get you away from your jobs, have unlimited free media coverage, and still create an aura of excitement, intrigue, and tension," he offered.

"Speaking of tension, but did you see his face when he thought I was dead?" interrupted Lee.

"You're a good actor Lee. And thanks for participating in this. I know you didn't have to, but I think it added immensely to the realism to have the war told from the U.S's point of view," thanked Louie.

"And to think I nearly 'passed' on the opportunity," said Lee.

"Oh Paul, there's someone whom wants to see you," said our President.

The door opened and my heart nearly stopped. In stepped Cheryl, looking more beautiful than ever. We walked towards each other, quickening the pace as we neared. We wrapped our arms around each other and kissed with a pent up passion of two years waiting.

"I think I'll pass on the party tonight, I've got better things to do, if you know what I mean," I quipped as I threw a sideways glance towards Cheryl.

And with that, Cheryl and I held hands and left for my trans, whereby we left for many beautiful and passionate nights on Phobos.